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ABSTRACT

This compilation of reprinted journal and newspaper articles covers the following topics: (1) The Front Lines; (2) Federal Policy; (3) Charter Schools; (4) School Choice; (5) Standards, Tests, and Accountability; (6) Teacher Quality; (7) Curriculum and Content; (8) Higher Education; and (9) Grab Bag. Each section is preceded by commentaries on the subject. In "Network Notes" reviews of selected publications, books and reports are included. Information about obtaining copies and their prices is provided. Articles include: (1) "Bush Beats the Blob" (Tucker Carlson); (2) "Gore Seizes Education as Campaign Platform" (Ethan Bronner); (3) "A School of Your Own" (James Traub); (4) "A Bold Experiment to Fix City Schools" (Matthew Miller); (5) "Ohio Lowering Reading Standards" (Michael Hawthorne); (6) "A Call for Education Change" (Jay Matthews); (7) "In Search of...Brain-Based Education" (John T. Bruer); (8) "The Class of Prop. 209" (James Traub); and (9) "What the Public Schools Can Learn From Hollywood and George W. Bush" (Christian Peters). (DFR)

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Summer 1999

Dear Education Reformer,

In the spirit of year-round schooling, we offer you a summertime pool of worthy school reform writings. Dive in!

The big news is from Florida, where Governor Jeb Bush pushed through his A-Plus accountability plan. Its most controversial—and promising—proviso provides scholarships to students stuck in failing schools. Bush's victory is documented in Tucker Carlson's perceptive *Weekly Standard* piece, "Bush Beats the Blob."

Writing in *First Things*, Christian Smith and David Sikkink ask and answer "Is Private Schooling Privatizing?" Their response: not at all. In fact, private school families participate in community organizations in greater proportions than public school parents. This piece is a powerful antidote to the recent, irresponsible comparisons of voucher systems to the Balkans.

Another favorite of ours is John Bruer's superb article "In Search of . . . Brain-Based Education," reprinted from the *Phi Delta Kappan.* Bruer debunks faulty education notions that purport to be based on brain research.

We're also proud to print Mary Eberstadt's "Why Ritalin Rules," published first in *Policy Review.* She carefully documents the rapid rise of Attention Deficit Disorder as the phantom menace of millions of kids' education problems–and explains the dubious uses and mixed benefits of treating this disorder with strong chemicals.

We're grateful to Danielle Wilcox, the Foundation's visiting research fellow, who did most of the work on this issue before returning to her doctoral program. Also pitching in were Monica Lee and Steve Coleman. Many thanks for their help.

We'll be back soon after fall classes begin. Until then, keep splashing.

Sincerely,

Chester E. Finn, Jr.
President

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CONTENTS

Vol. III, No. 3 *Summer 1999*

NET NOTES 1

THE FRONT LINES 7

Bush Beats the Blob.
By Tucker Carlson.
*The Weekly Standard.** May 17, 1999. 8

Turnaround in Texas Schools Looks Good for Bush in 2000.
By Ethan Bronner.
The New York Times. May 28, 1999. 12

Board Game.
By Matthew Miller.
*The New Republic.** April 26, 1999. 15

All 5 Union Allies Fall in MPS Races.
By Joe Williams.
The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel. April 7, 1999. 16

FEDERAL POLICY 19

Gore Seizes Education as Campaign Platform.
By Ethan Bronner.
The New York Times. May 17, 1999. 20

Clinton's Education Power Grab.
By Anna Bray Duff.
Investor's Business Daily. May 20, 1999. 22

The Education Vice President.
By Chester E. Finn, Jr.
The Weekly Standard. May 31, 1999. 24

Gore Curriculum.
By Christopher Caldwell.
*The Weekly Standard.** June 7, 1999. 27

CHARTER SCHOOLS 29

A School of Your Own.
By James Traub.
The New York Times Magazine. April 4, 1999. 30

Two Charter Schools' Troubles Raise Questions.
By Debbi Wilgoren and Valerie Strauss.
The Washington Post. May 9, 1999. 32

Bill Lann Lee's War on Charter Schools.
By Clint Bolick.
The Wall Street Journal. March 22, 1999. 34

Success for Kids Accustomed to Failure.
By Gail Russell Chaddock.
The Christian Science Monitor. April 13, 1999. 35

SCHOOL CHOICE 37

A Bold Experiment to Fix City Schools.
By Matthew Miller.
*The Atlantic Monthly.** July 1999. 38

Lesson for Public Schools When Choice is in Equation.
By Mike Bowler.
The Baltimore Sun. May 12, 1999. 46

Eager Response to Offer of Private Scholarships Raises Fears, Hopes.
Editorial.
USA TODAY. April 19, 1999. 48

The Public Revolution Private Money Might Bring.
By Terry M. Moe.
The Washington Post. May 9, 1999. 49

Public School Choice, at a Price.
By Joseph Berger.
The New York Times. May 2, 1999. 51

Turning the Tables on School Choice.
By Charles Wheelan.
The New York Times. May 25, 1999. 53

Is Private Schooling Privatizing?
By Christian Smith and David Sikkink.
*First Things.** April 1999. 55

New Test in Quebec Schools.
By Steven Pearlstein.
The Washington Post. May 10, 1999. 60

Ohio Court Upholds Constitutionality of School Voucher Programs.
By Kenneth J. Cooper.
The Washington Post. May 28, 1999. 61

How Gotham's Elite High Schools Escaped the Leveller's Ax.
By Heather Mac Donald.
City Journal. Spring 1999. 62

Class Peace.
The Economist. March 27, 1999. 71

STANDARDS, TESTS, AND ACCOUNTABILITY 73

Ohio Lowering Reading Standards.
By Michael Hawthorne.
The Cincinnati Enquirer. May 28, 1999. 74

Beating Poverty in the Classroom.
By Amy Argetsinger.
The Washington Post. May 16, 1999. 75

Mississippi Rising.
By Kathleen Vail.
*The American School Board Journal.** May 1999. 77

It's No Longer Uncool to Do Well in School.
By Patrick Welsh.
The Washington Post. March 14, 1999. 81

Score on the SAT to Score on the Field.
By Joe Paterno.
The Wall Street Journal. March 16, 1999. 83

True Tests.
By Jay Mathews.
The Washington Post Magazine. April 11, 1999. 84

Why Has Senior Year Lost Its Purpose for Many?
By June Kronholz.
The Wall Street Journal. March 23, 1999. 85

TEACHER QUALITY 87

A Call for Education Change.
By Jay Mathews.
The Washington Post. April 20, 1999. 88

Certified Failure: Teacher-Training System Needs Overhaul.
Editorial.
The Columbus Dispatch. May 26, 1999. 89

Method Madness.
By Carol Innerst.
*Washington Monthly.** May 1999. 90

Selling Teachers on School Reform.
By Richard Lee Colvin.
The Los Angeles Times. May 6, 1999. 94

States Not Raising Teacher Standards, Study Finds.
By Richard Lee Colvin.
The Los Angeles Times. May 26, 1999. 98

Class-Size Reduction Doesn't Benefit All.
By Randy Ross.
The Los Angeles Times. April 7, 1999. 100

Dueling Goals for Education.
By Arthur Levine.
The New York Times. April 7, 1999. 101

Class Career Moves.
By Beth Daley.
The Boston Globe. April 4, 1999. 102

CURRICULUM & CONTENT 105

In Search of...Brain-Based Education.
By John T. Bruer.
*Phi Delta Kappan.** May 1999. 106

Multicultural Literacy.
By Sandra Stotsky.
*The School Administrator.** May 1999. 114

Educators Square Off Over Algebra.
By Jay Mathews.
The Washington Post. April 19, 1999. 117

Schools Devalue the Drive to be Valedictorian.
By Lawrence Muhammed.
USA TODAY. April 5, 1999. 119

HIGHER EDUCATION 121

The Class of Prop. 209.
By James Traub.
The New York Times Magazine. May 2, 1999. 122

The Feds Strike Back.
By John Leo.
U.S. News & World Report. May 31, 1999. 129

Do Too Many Kids Go to College?
By James Bowman.
*The National Review.** May 17, 1999. 130

'College is Better Than No College, Period. You'll Thank Me Later.'
By Ron Suskind.
The Wall Street Journal. April 1, 1999. 133

GRAB BAG 137

What the Public Schools Can Learn From Hollywood And George W. Bush.
By Christian Peters.
*The Washington Monthly.** May 1999. 138

Easy Pickings.
By James Heany.
*The Washington Monthly.** May 1999. 141

Why Ritalin Rules.
By Mary Eberstadt.
*Policy Review.** April & May 1999. 143

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Network Notes

Choice & Charters

Home Schooling Works

The Home School Legal Defense Association commissioned a substantial study to evaluate home-based education and has presented the findings in this recent report. The results indicate that students who are home-schooled do better on average on standardized tests than their public and private school counterparts. However, as the authors point out, the families who home-school their children do not represent a cross-section of the American public (nor, so far as we can tell, did the sub-set of home schoolers examined here represent a cross-section of all home schoolers). They tend to be wealthier and more educated. While this makes comparisons difficult, the results do suggest that home schooling is benefiting many students and provides a viable educational alternative.

Receive a copy for $2.00 by contacting the Home School Legal Defense Association, P.O. Box 3000, Purcellville, VA 20134; phone: (540) 338-6600; or on the web: www.hslda.org. •*SC*

Arizona Charter School Progress Evaluation

This is the product of a yearlong study of charter schools by Arizona State University's Morrison Institute for Public Policy, on behalf of the Arizona Department of Education. Prepared by Lori A. Mulholland, the forty-three-page report paints a helpful if ambiguous picture of the progress of the state's charter school enterprise over the last five years. The majority of the report is a close look at results synthesized from surveys of students, parents, teachers and administrators. Although there is a lot of information to sort through, the writing and presentation of the material are generally clear and concise. We wish the achievement results were clearer, though. The comparisons here (between charter pupils and traditional public school students) are plenty interesting but ultimately inconclusive. Of course, that's often true of social science.

Plenty of data here about the biggest charter program in the land. Obtain your very own copy for $8.54 by contacting the Arizona Department of Education at 1535 West Jefferson Street, Phoenix, Arizona 85007, by telephone at 602-542-4361, or by e-mail at ADE@mail1.ade.state.az.us. •*MNL*

Contents

Choice & Charters
Standards & Tests
Teachers & Unions
Great Schools
Federal Policy
Book Review
Etc.

Standards & Tests

Accountability: The Key to Charter Renewal

This meticulous 24-page guide, written by Bruno V. Manno for the Center for Education Reform, offers those interested in launching or sustaining a charter school valuable advice on how to create practical accountability agreements. Since the charter movement began in 1991, operationalizing accountability has been one of the major hurdles for everyone involved. This guide will help both charter sponsors and operators create better means of gauging school success. Manno methodically covers all the major issues associated with accountability, from stating the mission to dealing with the consequences of non-compliance. He includes non-academic goals and how to incorporate them into the agreements. The appendix offers helpful examples: a list of expectations from the District of Columbia Public Charter School Board, a sample accountability agreement from Chicago, and Massachusetts's annual reporting guidelines.

For a copy, write to The Center for Education Reform, 1001 Connecticut Ave, NW, Washington, DC 20036, call 202-822-9000, or order it from the web at www.edreform.com for $10 plus shipping and handling. Readers can also download a free copy at www.edreform.com/pubs/charter_school_accountability.htm. •*MNL*

Too Much Testing of the Wrong Kind; Too Little of the Right Kind in K-12 Education

The ever-interesting Paul Barton, who heads the Policy Information Center of the Educational Testing Service, devotes this short but pricey pamphlet to an orderly critique of "massive" standardized testing–

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evidently E.T.S. practices academic freedom–and a murkier plea for something else to take its place. The something else appears to consist of more complex assessments aligned with high quality content and performance standards. Along the way, Barton takes on numerous timely topics, such as national testing (he offers an alternative) and exit exams (he equivocates). He's usually trenchant and clear, however, and anyone engaged in today's testing wars will want to know what he thinks, even when he's wrong. These 32 pages will set you back $9.50 from Policy Information Center, Mail Stop 04-R, Educational Testing Service, Rosedale Road, Princeton, NJ 08541. Phone 609-734-5694. E-mail PIC@ets.org. You can also download a free copy from www.ets.org/research/pic. •*CEFjr*

Teachers & Unions

The Academic Quality of Prospective Teachers: The Impact of Admissions and Licensure Testing

Did you think Al Gore's release of the 1998 NAEP reading results felt like a political pep rally? That paled alongside the press conference staged on behalf of this report by Drew H. Gitomer, Andrew S. Latham, and Robert Ziomek for the Educational Testing Service (ETS). Leaders from every major education group—including both teacher unions and the American Association for Colleges of Teacher Education—showed up to cheer its findings. Why? Here's a quote from the report's abstract: "In contrast to many previous research claims that teachers lack the academic ability of other college-educated professionals, the data in this study suggests [sic] that teachers in academic subject areas have academic skills that are equal to or higher than those of the larger college graduate population."

In light of the dismal standards that now pervade many of America's institutions of higher education, the discovery that teachers are no less able than other college grads is underwhelming. What's more, it's not necessarily true, no matter what the authors of this study would like you to think. At least their data don't sustain their conclusion. They compared the SAT/ACT scores of college *graduates* who pass the Praxis teacher licensing exams with the SAT/ACT scores of other college *students*. All we can say with certainty is that persons who stayed in college til the bitter end, won a degree, then took and passed a teacher licensure test do not know less than all college students combined, many of whom never made it to graduation.

The study also compares the math SAT scores of prospective teachers who pass the math licensure exam with those of all college students. The future teachers do well. But all that really says is that future math teachers know more math than dance majors, literature majors, etc. Finally, the study contends that schools of education accredited by the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) produce graduates who perform at higher levels on the Praxis exam. But as Professor Michael Podgursky of the University of Missouri points out, the data released by ETS does not allow us to know this for sure. They show that more students from NCATE-accredited institutions pass the exam, but since passing scores vary greatly from state to state, and we don't know the students' actual scores, we cannot compare their performance nationally with non-NCATE students.

Matching Praxis scores to ACT and SAT scores was a worthwhile project. We hope ETS continues to develop its methodology and produces finer data on prospective teachers. But we're going to keep watching over its shoulder to make sure its conclusions (and press hoopla) match its data.

To get your $15 copy of this rather misleading treatise, write The Teaching and Learning Division, Research and Data Analysis Group, Mail Stop 15-D, Educational Testing Service, Rosedale Road, Princeton, NJ 08541, call 609-921-9000, or download it for free from www.ets.org/praxis/. •*MJP*

How Teacher Licensing Tests Fall Short

In this helpful 23-page report from the Education Trust, Ruth Mitchell and Patte Barth reveal findings from their recent survey of state teacher licensing tests that deal with subject matter and general knowledge. The conclusion: with rare exceptions, today's tests are "multiple-choice assessments dominated by high-school level material." The authors suggest that current teacher licensing standards actually harm students by allowing unqualified teachers to enter the classroom.

The report concludes with a list of short and long term action items favored by the Education Trust. We agree with many of them—though we wish that Education Trust would place greater faith in the school-level leaders they seek to hold accountable for results. Contact The Education Trust for your $2,50 copy at 1725 K Street, NW., Suite 200, Washington, DC 20006, phone 202-293-1217, or fax 202-293-2605. A free copy can also be obtained on the web at www.edtrust.org/pubs-online.html. •*MNL*

Kentucky's Teachers: Charting a Course for KERA's Second Decade

In this clearly written and timely report, our former colleague Stephen Clements, on behalf of the Kentucky Long-Term Policy Research Center,

examines teacher quality in the Bluegrass State. The report examines the current condition of Kentucky teachers in comparison to those elsewhere, then presents data on various indicators of teacher quality, and finishes with an outline of issues and policy options. Its analysis and lessons strike us as applicable to the country as a whole.

Clements finds that most extant measures of teacher quality in Kentucky focus on inputs rather then outputs and thus measure credentials, not necessarily what a teacher knows or what he or she can accomplish in the classroom. The report also addresses the problem of teachers who are not adequately trained in the subjects they teach—both because of weak subject area training and because they are teaching out of the field in which they majored.

Like our own teacher manifesto *The Teachers We Need and How to Get More of Them*, Clements encourages greater emphasis on subject matter content. He is less critical of teacher education programs, however, and assumes a major continuing role for them. Mostly, though, his analysis of the existing data is on target.

To order a free copy, contact the Kentucky Long-Term Policy Research Center at 111 St. James Court, Frankfort, Kentucky 40601; Phone 800-853-2851; or check it out on-line at www.lrc.state.ky.us/ltprc. •*SC*

A Critical Look at Texas Colleges of Education

Joseph M. Horn holds nothing back in his scathing critique of teacher training in Texas. After tackling a few broad education issues such as social promotion and grade inflation, Horn pinpoints problems with current teacher preparation programs. He argues that children fail in school mainly because their teachers are academically deficient. Schools of education not only admit weak students but also fail to screen them out, creating a pool of weak teachers. To compound the problem, these ideological institutions urge future educators to focus on poor learners rather than more able students and to give higher priority to social/emotional development than to academics. This combination has and will continue to hurt Texas schools, Horn asserts, unless major reforms are made.

Although a bit muddled in places, this report offers important criticisms and recommendations for the Texas teacher training system. To obtain a copy (for $10), write to Texas Public Policy Foundation, P.O. Box 40519, San Antonio, TX 78229, call 210-614-0080, or fax 210-614-2649. Copies can also be obtained for free from the web at www.tppf.org/cltce.html. •*MNL*

Smaller Classes Not Vouchers Increase Student Achievement

We confess that this report's provocative title and the track record of its author, socialist University of Wisconsin professor Alex Molnar, led us to expect a one-sided blast at school choice and a knee-jerk defense of some progressive cure-du-jour. Actually, it's a fairly balanced critique of the voucher argument and the present evidence, coupled with a review of recent class size research. We disagree with its conclusions and recommendations–Pennsylvania should reject vouchers and invest heavily in class size reduction for grades K-1–but we acknowledge that it gives equal time to those who think otherwise.

The voucher section includes historical background on the policy idea, updates on the Milwaukee program, an analysis of the conflicting research findings in Milwaukee and Cleveland, and an essay on the philosophical underpinnings of vouchers.

The class size section focuses largely on the Tennessee STAR experiment (and mentions Eric Hanushek's critique of it), but also includes research from California, Nevada, and Wisconsin.

Perhaps the biggest problem with Molnar's analysis is that he isolates these reforms. Few voucher supporters are concerned only with the achievement of students who transfer from public to private schools; most hope that competition will prod the public schools to improve, thus lifting all boats. Likewise, the unintended consequence of class size reduction—erosion of teacher quality, especially in disadvantaged areas—must be weighed. In other words, besides comparing these very different policies with each other, their impact on the larger education system should also be appraised.

Would you like to see for yourself? Contact the report's publisher, Keystone Research Center, at 412 North Third Street, Harrisburg, PA 17101, phone 717-255-7181, fax 717-255-7193, or e-mail KeystoneRC@aol.com. It's free. •*MJP*

The New York City Teachers' Union Contract: Shackling Principals' Leadership

This terrific new report from the Manhattan Institute's Center for Civic Innovation cuts to the heart of school reform: in order to create high-performing, accountable schools, principals need the power to shape their own staff. They need the freedom to hire the best people for the job, people who share a common education vision, and they need the autonomy to replace those who turn out to be incompetent or uninspired. Yet this is virtually impossible in New York City because of the union contract, explains Dale Ballou, author of the study

and economics professor at the University of Massachusetts.

Ballou took the closest-ever look at the United Federation of Teachers' contract with New York City's Board of Education. He also interviewed principals and district officials. He found that Gotham's principals have little say over teachers transferred into their schools, little recourse to solve problems with poorly performing teachers, and little flexibility in making classroom assignments. In the new world of educational accountability, where principals' jobs are on the line if they don't get results, these restrictions practically assure failure.

Ballou provides concrete examples of how the contract gets in the way of school reform. If you live in New York, this report is a must. Otherwise, it's a good model of the kind of study needed in every community with a teachers union contract. Get yours by writing the Manhattan Institute at 52 Vanderbilt Avenue, New York, NY 10017, by calling 212-599-7000, or by surfing to www.manhattan-institute.org. This "Civic Report" (No. 6, June 1999) is free. •*MJP*

Great Schools

Portraits of Six Benchmark Schools: Diverse Approaches to Improving Student Achievement

The cover says it all: "High standards, Multiple Changes, Strong Leadership, Collaborative Teams, Committed Teachers." Gordon Cawelti, who for many years headed the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (A.S.C.D.) and is now a research consultant, penned the 70-page report. It's nicely written. All six schools are public, but they're interestingly diverse. For example, one is a selective college-prep school in Harlem; one is in Canada; one is the Edison Project's showcase school in Wichita; and one is a Texas school palpably affected by the Lone Star State's new standards and heavy emphasis on accountability. If you'd like a copy, contact Educational Research Service, 2000 Clarendon Blvd., Arlington, VA 22201. Phone 703-243-2100; fax 791-7309; the publications order number is 800-791-9308; or you can e-mail ERS@ers.org or surf to www.ers.org. •*CEFjr*

No Excuses: Seven Principles of Low-Income Schools Who Set the Standard for High Achievement

Written by the Heritage Foundation's Samuel Casey Carter, this thin 36-page booklet highlights the achievements of the seven winners of the 1999 Salvatori Prize for American Citizenship, all of them school principals who transformed some of the country's toughest education challenges into some of the nation's best schools. Each short profile provides the reader with a vivid look at one of these schools as well as the practices and ideas that led to its transformation.

These seven people are a diverse crew. Two are Teach for America alum who decided to launch a new (charter) school in the poorest part of Houston. Others are career veterans who have now moved on to impacting citywide reform. All believe that the key to reform is to set high standards and press relentlessly for them. (This philosophy is also the foundation for the "No Excuses" campaign associated with publication of the report.)

To receive a copy of *No Excuses*, write the Heritage Foundation at 214 Massachusetts Avenue, N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002 or call 202-546-4400. Readers can also order the booklet from the web at http://www.heritage.org/bookstore/ for $5.00. •*MNL*

Dispelling the Myth: High Poverty Schools Exceeding Expectations

Let's say it again: high expectations and standards can make a difference in the education of all students, including the most disadvantaged. That is one of the chief findings of Education Trust's survey of high poverty schools. The report lists schools that have levels of poverty over 50% yet score within their states' top ten schools on math and/or reading assessments or are among the top ten schools in the progress being made on state tests. What's the secret? High standards, increased instructional time for math and reading, systems for monitoring progress of individual students, and accountable leaders.

To get a copy of this helpful survey, download it off the Web at www.edtrust.org or contact The Education Trust at 1725 K Street, N.W., Suite 200, Washington, DC 20006; Phone 202-293-1217. •*SC*

Federal Policy

Reform and Results: An Analysis of Title I in the Great City Schools, 1994-95 to 1997-98

The Council of the Great City Schools recently published this examination of the federal Title I program as it has played out in a number of the country's urban school systems over a three-year period. There are lots of useful charts and tables and some brief sketches of Title I program emphases in particular cities. The burden of the report is that the approach Congress took when it reauthorized Title I in 1994 is bearing fruit in many communities. There are lots of interesting process data here about how the program is being implemented. The report also claims that the post-1994 strategy has produced

achievement gains. The data, however, are shaky–self-reporting by school systems based on whatever tests they administer–and, as the report acknowledges, cannot substitute for proper evaluation. It also needs to be said that even the reported gains leave many youngsters in desperate shape. Random example: "The percent of urban school Title I students in grade 8 scoring at or above the 50th percentile in math increased from 17.8% in 1994-95 to 22.3% in 1997-98." In other words, fewer than a quarter of these eighth grade youngsters are in the top half of the national distribution–and that's a distribution based on average performance, not external standards.

You may well want to see the data for yourself, but we judge that this is a quasi-political document meant to discourage major shifts in Title I during the present E.S.E.A. reauthorization cycle. Seventeen pages plus appendices. Copies can be obtained from the Council of the Great City Schools for $10. You can write to 1301 Pennsylvania Ave. NW, Suite 702, Washington, D.C. 20004 or call 202-393-2427. There is also a free pdf version of the report on the web at www.cgcs.org. •*CEFjr*

Measured Progress: An Evaluation of the Impact of Federal Education Legislation Enacted in 1994

Congress mandated–and the federal Education Department appointed–a 23 member "Independent Review Panel" to advise the government on the evaluation of E.S.E.A. and Goals 2000, as enacted in 1994. Christopher Cross of the Council for Basic Education chairs it. Most of the members are prominent representatives of the public school establishment. Its short report is meant to inform Congress's deliberations during the present reauthorization cycle. It's a cautious and ultimately predictable report that says progress is being made, more needs to be done, and don't rock the boat.

If you'd like to see for yourself, contact the U.S. Department of Education's Publication Center for a free copy by telephone 877-433-7827, fax to 301-470-1244, e-mail edpubs@inet.ed.gov, or mail at ED Pubs, Education Publications Center, U.S. Department of Education, P.O. Box 1398, Jessup, MD 20794-1398. You can also visit their website at www.ed.gov/pubs/edpubs.html. •*CEFjr*

Book Review

History & Educational Policymaking

University of Michigan historian Maris Vinovskis knows a lot about education research as well as history and, as this book demonstrates, a good bit about education policymaking, too. Basically a collection of interesting essays, the book illuminates the interplay of history and education policy with continuing attention to the role of research and statistics. The contents range from the 19th century to the late 20th, and from such specific programs as Even Start to such broad themes as "education and the economic transformation of Nineteenth-Century America." The three essays on early childhood education are especially interesting, as are Vinovskis's ruminations on the role of history in education policymaking. Yale University Press (www.yale.edu/yup) 1999; ISBN 0-300-07571-5. 336 pages. •*CEFjr*

The Wasting of a People

This idiosyncratic book by Russell Shelton is a philosophical critique of the existing state of American education at all levels. He provides a distinctive perspective on educational reform as a teacher of high school and college physics. He offers persuasive comments on the need for standards and the shortcomings of ed school classes and programs. In the chapter titled "Learning Unit," he proposes individualized instruction centered around the use of technology rather than the traditional lecture method. This reviewer welcomed his statement that "[a]ny reform that burdens the teacher further [with duties not directly related to teaching] will fail and should fail." However, Shelton's analysis sometimes lacks sophistication. For instance, he appears blind to the socializing and humanizing role of a liberal arts education. He criticizes humanities courses as too soft and too subjective, and as teaching little. That's not always so.

Five dollars will get you a copy of this interesting if uneven book. Contact Russell D. Shelton at rdssyzygy@aol.com. •*SC*

Etc.

Improving Mathematics Education Using Results from NAEP and TIMSS

This 48-page report published by the State Education Assessment Center of the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), written by Linda Dager Wilson and Rolf K. Blank, contends that much can be learned about what needs to change in U.S. math education by deconstructing recent TIMSS and National Assessment results. Some of this analysis strikes us as perceptive and some as banal (e.g. well prepared teachers are a plus). Have a look if you like. Contact CCSSO publications at 202-336-7044, e-mail Mr. Blank at rolfb@ccsso.org or surf to www.ccsso.org where you'll find a copy to download. •*CEFjr*

The Educational System in the United States: Case Study Findings

To provide a suitable context in which to interpret the results of the Third International Math and Science Study (TIMSS), the U.S. Department of Education conducted an intensive survey of education in the United States, Germany, and Japan. This thick volume presents the results of the U.S. case study project, directed by Harold Stevenson and Shin-Ying Lee at the University of Michigan. It considers sixteen schools, representative of the ethnic and cultural diversity in America, in an effort to construct a profile of the typical school. Readers will find not only an overview of national, state, and local initiatives, but also of the attitudes that parents and teachers hold toward these mandates. The report also deploys this overview-and-reaction format on topics such as how schools address individual differences, how they impact adolescents' lives, and how teachers fare in the profession.

Due to the immense task of surveying the entire U.S. school system, the report fails to consider any topic at great length. And because it did not include rural schools in its data base, this report is pertinent only to metropolitan school systems. Copies are for sale ($21) from the U. S. Government Printing Office at Superintendent of Documents, Mail Stop: SSOP, Washington, DC 20402-9328 or by telephone at 202-512-1800, fax at 202-512- 2250, or on the web at www.access.gpo.gov/. The full text is also available at www.ed.gov/pubs/USCaseStudy/. •*MNL*

Answers in the Tool Box: Academic Intensity, Attendance Patterns, and Bachelor's Degree Attainment

The tireless and enterprising Cliff Adelman–perhaps the ablest scholar remaining at the federal Office of Educational Research and Improvement–has just published this welcome analysis of what leads to degree completion among people attending 4 year colleges. It is based on several large federal data sets–transcripts, test results, surveys, etc. There's a ton of insight and useful guidance here. Perhaps the most interesting (if not surprising) finding is that the greatest contributor to earning a bachelor's degree in college is the "academic intensity" of one's high school curriculum–and how well one does in mastering that curriculum. It matters far more than one's socio-economic status and parents' education. This anti-deterministic, anti-fatalistic conclusion needs to be repeated again and again. Young people's education destiny isn't settled by their choice of families; it's also powerfully shaped by their choice of schools, courses, teachers, standards and academic effort. Be warned, though, that this is a fairly dense, 124-page government report. To get a copy (while supplies last), phone 877-4ED-PUBS or write ED Pubs, U.S. Department of Education, P.O. Box 1398, Jessup, MD 20794. •*CEFjr*

Cities, Suburbs and Schools: Would Citizens in Chicago, Cleveland and Milwaukee Support Greater Collaboration?

Public Agenda conducted focus group interviews in three cities and their surrounding suburbs to investigate the public's views on regional approaches to education challenges. Participants identified their core concerns as safe schools, parental involvement, quality teachers and basic skills. Regional collaboration did not spontaneously arise as an issue for most. However, when the topic was broached, participants favored voluntary approaches that did not threaten existing neighborhood schools and they rejected such top-down solutions as large-scale busing and redistricting. Typical comment: "I think there is a lot to be said for neighborhood schools; there's a spirit and community there." On the benefits of magnet schools as way to increase collaboration one participant said, "I would try it; I always try to get my kid the best education." Another plus to regional collaboration was increased diversity. But a number of participants expressed concern that collaboration not distract from needed local reforms. As one minority parent put it: "They need to guarantee that neighborhood schools have what they need to teach kids. You should be able to get it right there in your own school."

Order this report from Public Agenda for $7.50 at 6 East 39th St., New York, New York 10016 or by calling 212-686-6610; visit their web site at www.publicagenda.org. •*SC*

Network Notes are written by Stephen Coleman, Chester E. Finn, Jr., Monica N. Lee, and Michael J. Petrilli.

The Front Lines

We've long argued that much of the real energy in school reform comes from innovative governors and enterprising mayors. Here are some cases in point.

Let's start with the Bush Brothers. Tucker Carlson's *Weekly Standard* piece "Bush Beats the Blob" describes the historic victory of Jeb's accountability-and-choice plan in Florida. In a shrewd stroke, Bush linked vouchers to the push for standards and consequences. Under his plan, failing schools will be identified, warned, helped, and then—if they do not improve—may lose their students to vouchers. Once the initiative gets up and running, it will be the first statewide voucher program in the country. (Of course, it's not called that.)

Jeb's brother "W" couldn't have been too unhappy with Ethan Bronner's boosterish *New York Times* piece, "Turnaround in Texas Schools Looks Good for Bush in 2000." Bronner details Texas's impressive NAEP gains during the 1990s, linked to the state's own comprehensive accountability system. Bush—who admits that this system predated him—has worked earnestly to raise the bar and make sure all kids are reading by third grade. He hasn't made everyone happy, though. Bronner explains the animus toward Bush by some conservatives concerned that Texas's tests are too soft. (Or maybe they have other motives for their continuing effort to pull him down.) Nevertheless, the Lone Star State is looking pretty good to us.

On to the cities. We'll admit a touch of skepticism that urban school boards can effectively guide their districts towards improvement. There's plenty of evidence that many a board has been conquered by adult interests—teachers unions, party hacks, bus drivers, etc. More and more cities are responding by dumping their school boards (see Detroit, Cleveland, etc.). But two reform-minded mayors have found a way to turn their cities' elected school boards into reform agents. First, we learn about Los Angeles Mayor Richard Riordan's efforts in "Board Game," a *New Republic* article by Matthew Miller. Riordan raised gobs of money—and spent some of his own—to support the campaigns of a reform slate. It worked: two candidates won outright and the other forced a run-off. One local observer noted, "This is really the last best chance for the school district."

A similar strategy paid off in Milwaukee. The *Journal Sentinel* headline tells the story: "All 5 Union Allies Fall in MPS Races." Why? Because Democratic mayor John Norquist and school board member John Gardner supported and campaigned for a reform slate. An astonishing $500,000 was spent in the campaign, which is generally being interpreted as a major political victory for supporters of choice. Said one of the victors: "I think this was a clear sign that people want change." Maybe local school boards aren't so hopeless after all.

MJP

The Weekly Standard, May 17, 1999

Bush Beats the Blob

Jeb Bush Takes on the Education Establishment—and Wins

By Tucker Carlson

Tallahassee, Florida

The Florida legislature passed Gov. Jeb Bush's education bill on April 30 and the first thing state representative Les Miller could think of was the tragedy at Columbine High School. "A bigger threat than any kid walking into a school with a gun," explained Miller, the minority leader of the Florida House, "is the Republican legislature putting all the schools under siege with vouchers." Betty Holzendorf, a Democratic state senator from Jacksonville, agreed with Miller—an act of violence had just taken place. "The vouchers in this bill," Holzendorf said gravely, "are the lynchings of the civil rights movements."

It takes a lot to move even Florida state legislators to rhetoric this overheated, but Bush's education bill did it. The legislation creates the country's first statewide voucher program. Children who attend Florida's worst public schools will soon be able to take about $4,000 apiece in state money and use it to attend any other school of their choice, including private and religious schools. Supporters of the bill hailed it as a historic breakthrough, a reform that, once it clears the inevitable legal challenges, will revive Florida's ailing public school system, while rescuing thousands of poor children from the crippling effects of an inadequate education. Opponents likened it to mass murder.

Either way, Jeb Bush's voucher bill is a very big deal. It's also wildly insulting—to the educrats and party hacks ("the blob," as William Bennett once described them) who opposed it, to the teachers' unions whose monopoly is threatened by it, to the various Republican governors and state legislators who have tried hard, so far unsuccessfully, to pass similar legislation. All were outdone and out-maneuvered by a 46-year-old with a 12-year-old's name who until six months ago had never been elected to anything.

How did Bush do it? First, by having the good fortune to get elected along with a Republican legislature amenable to his goals. Second, by pushing his voucher plan relentlessly. Third, and probably most important, by appropriating the style of his ideological enemies. Jeb Bush is as conservative as any governor in America, and much more so than most. But you'd never know it unless you listened carefully, or took a close look at the bills he supports. If Bush's legislation is radical, his tone is all accommodation and empathy. Not at all scary. And therefore quite effective. It's a useful trick. Cynics say he picked it up from watching Bill Clinton. More likely, it's a lesson he learned during his first campaign for governor.

> IF BUSH'S VOUCHER LEGISLATION IS RADICAL, HIS TONE IS ALL ACCOMMODATION AND EMPATHY. NOT AT ALL SCARY, AND QUITE EFFECTIVE.

Long involved with conservative foundations and causes, Bush entered the 1994 campaign with a reputation as—depending on how it was being spun—either a straight-shooting man of ideas or a hard-edged ideologue. His opponents made the case for ideologue, and Bush gave them plenty of ammunition. During the primary that year, Bush gave a speech in which he said that welfare mothers "should be able to get their life together and find a husband." One of the other Republicans in the race promptly ran ads accusing Bush of being insensitive to women. Bush complained that his remarks had been taken out of context, but the caricature of Bush as a wild-eyed right-winger stuck. "He has no track record, no consequential public service, and his ideas are shallow and radical," pronounced the *St. Petersburg Times*.

Tucker Carlson is a staff writer at The Weekly Standard

Bush's opponent in the general election, incumbent governor Lawton Chiles, kept the wound fresh. Chiles, who himself had become rich from his investments in the Red Lobster restaurant chain, slammed Bush as a wealthy dilettante with extreme, even dangerous plans for the state of Florida, very much including school vouchers. As proof of his ideological looniness, Chiles often pointed to Bush's running mate, a conservative state representative named Tom Feeney. Though there was no evidence Feeney had ever uttered a racist word, Chiles denounced the aspiring lieutenant governor as "the David Duke of Florida politics." By the time the Chiles campaign spread word that Bush wanted to eliminate Social Security, many voters were frightened enough to believe it. In November, while Republicans in the rest of the country were having the most successful year in memory, Bush lost to Chiles by less than 70,000 votes.

After the election, Bush's life seemed to hover on the edge of collapse. In interviews, he admitted he had neglected his family while running for office. During the campaign, Bush said, his marriage had begun to unravel. One of his children developed a drug problem. Bush publicly pledged to become a better person. He stopped working on Sundays and began going to church regularly. In his spare time, he teamed up with the head of the Miami Urban League to found Florida's first charter school, in Dade County's blighted Liberty City neighborhood. Meanwhile, Bush also started the Foundation for Florida's Future, a nonprofit organization from which he built a new campaign for governor. On Easter eve 1995, he converted to Catholicism.

Bush began the 1998 campaign determined to position himself as a compassionate centrist. While four years earlier he had called for the abolition of the state's department of education, this time Bush chose that department's head, former education commissioner Frank Brogan, as his running mate. Bush visited hundreds of schools, traveled to migrant worker camps, black churches, and other traditionally Democratic campaign venues. He gave speeches in flawless Spanish and waxed enthusiastic about the state's ethnic diversity. He talked constantly about children. He said relatively little about abortion, school prayer, homosexuality, or guns. Voters loved it. His opponent, lieutenant governor Buddy MacKay, slipping in the polls, tried to use Bush's apparent change of heart against him. "We call him the kinder, gentler Bush," said MacKay's campaign manager.

"I call him 'the Bush brother with balls,'" says Mike Murphy, the Republican consultant who produced Bush's advertising. While he did come off as more gentle than he had in 1994, Murphy argues that Bush never became squishy or less committed to conservative ideas. As evidence, Murphy points to Bush's unwavering support for school vouchers, despite polling that showed many voters, including many Republicans, were uncomfortable with the idea. "He could have listened to us political consultants and downplayed vouchers." Instead, Murphy says, "Jeb didn't blink."

He certainly had opportunities to. During the campaign, the state's teachers' union spent more than $1 million on ads attacking Bush for his position on vouchers. Days before the election, Hillary Clinton came to Tampa to warn voters about Bush's "risky voucher scheme" (as well as about his efforts to "turn back the clock" on abortion). Thanks in part to his friendly, non-threatening personal style—Bush didn't seem like the kind of guy who'd want to hurt children with risky schemes—the attacks bounced off. Bush crushed MacKay at the polls, even winning a remarkable 13 percent of the black vote. (In the end Buddy MacKay became governor for three weeks anyway, when lame duck Lawton Chiles died of heart failure in mid-December while exercising at the governor's mansion. MacKay immediately freed six female murderers from prison on the grounds they were victims of "battered woman syndrome.")

Bush may have kept the faith on vouchers, but he didn't actually use the word. He couldn't, explains Jeanne Allen, a longtime school choice promoter, especially not in front of black or Hispanic audiences. "The word 'voucher' has been so damaged by opponents," says Allen, head of the Center for Education Reform in Washington. "Vouchers equate with free market, equate with conservatives, equate with segregation." No doubt about it, agrees Mike Petrilli of the Manhattan Institute, another professional voucher booster. "'Vouchers' as a term is off the table. When people hear the word 'vouchers,' they think of anti-public education. But when you talk about it in terms of 'parental choice,' or 'child-centered education,' or 'money following children to the schools of their choice,' support for the idea goes up and up."

Bush chose "opportunity scholarships" as his trademark euphemism ("'scholarship' sounds like something you get if you do well in school," explains one school choice analyst at a Washington think tank), and even then went out of his way to call attention to other, less controversial elements of his educa-

tion platform. Bush's "A+ Plan for Education" lists eight separate proposals to improve education in Florida, and it is possible to read the entire list without noticing that vouchers are among them. ("Opportunity scholarships" appear at number six on the roster, sandwiched stealthily between "Up to $100 per student bonus for improving and high performing schools" and "Higher standards for educators.") When the voucher bill finally passed on the last day of this year's legislative session, Bush's office issued a press release with a picture of the governor standing next to a Democratic state representative from Miami named Beryl Roberts. Roberts was dressed from head to toe in African clothing, complete with turban and robes. The message was hard to miss: Black people support vouchers—that is, opportunity scholarships—too.

In person, Bush is strikingly direct about why he avoids the word "vouchers." "It's like 'Christian Right,' it's like 'extreme Republicans,'" he says. "It's a term that has people in the middle, people who are concerned about their kids, worried. It changes the whole debate. Why not use language that gives people a chance to hear you out? The end result is that we use language that helped us pass the most dynamic and dramatic reform of public education of any state in the country."

Bush is sitting in his "working office," a plain, almost unadorned space about the size of a gas station men's room next door to his ceremonial office. There is what looks like a McDonald's Happy Meal toy on his computer, a Bible next to his mouse pad. Bush, who is in shirt sleeves and cheap-looking rubber-soled shoes, seems as informal as the room. He speaks slowly and in much more complete sentences than his better-known male relatives. He makes a good case for why style should serve substance. Certain symbols, certain words, he says, "create barriers" between a politician and the public whose lives he seeks to improve. Voters, after all, are practical, not ideological. "They want safe streets, they want schools that work. I try to use language that draws them toward my ideas, rather than language that pushes them away." In other words, if the "V-word" causes trouble, discard it. Who cares? It's the improved schools that count.

There's something to this argument, and Bush has done everything possible since the election to reassure "people in the middle" that he is a decent, practical person more interested in results than ideology. Before even taking office, Bush made good on a campaign promise and pushed the state's tomato growers to increase wages paid to migrant farm workers. Tomato pickers got a nickel-a-bucket raise, and Bush became perhaps the first Republican governor in history to be hailed in a newspaper headline as "A Friend to Farm Workers." His inauguration speech a month later contained not a hint of fire or whiff of brimstone. Instead, the man once depicted as a dangerous ideologue urged his fellow citizens to help make Florida "a better neighborhood, a nicer place." "This is our call to arms," he said.

It's easy to mock this rhetoric. (Isn't Florida already a pretty nice place? Since when is it a neighborhood?) It's harder to dismiss the results Bush has achieved using it. Florida's voucher program really is the most dramatic education reform in the country. And if you don't believe it, consider what other politicians are offering up as the next Bold New Vision. In Iowa the other day, for example, Al Gore explained his plans for "change" in education. "I'm not talking about slow, piddling changes," Gore said. "I believe we need to really shake things up and have radical, truly revolutionary change in our public schools." At which point, the *Wall Street Journal* pointed out, Gore proceeded to call "for more computers, smaller class sizes, extra teacher training, and making preschool programs universal"—"reforms" so conventional it's hard to think of a politician in America who has not already endorsed them. If Gore considers such ideas revolutionary, it's hard to know how he would even categorize what Jeb Bush has just done in Florida.

Bush's stealth conservatism has achieved impressive results. Still, at times it can seem inadequate. During the last session, Republicans in the legislature passed a bill that requires doctors to notify the parents of girls under 18 who seek abortions. Democrats were infuriated by the bill, mostly because they recognized it for what it was—an attempt by people who think

abortion is wrong to curtail abortion. It's all right to abhor abortion and use legal means to fight it. Yet Bush, who has promised to sign the bill, refuses to acknowledge the legislation has anything to do with something so controversial as pro-life sentiment. Instead, he says, the bill grew out of "a parental rights question more than anything else. Why is it so bad to at least give parents the opportunity to love and console? That's our argument."

The problem is, it's not a very powerful argument. If Bush believes abortion is wrong—and by all accounts he does, strongly—it would be more effective, if politically difficult, simply to say so. And keep saying so. Old fashioned ideological rhetoric may be ugly and divisive, but it changes minds. Often the inclusive, "nicer place" variety merely soothes them.

Not that a little soothing rhetoric can't be helpful. In fact, Bush's friendliness and warm personality are about the only things standing between him and a totally obstructionist Democratic caucus next legislative session. Democrats left Tallahassee at the end of April angry—angry at being out-muscled by Republicans, angry that Bush got virtually every piece of legislation he asked for. Among the angriest was Rep. Lois Frankel of West Palm Beach. Frankel was particularly miffed by Bush's education plan, which she believes was created and passed by religious extremists. "This is definitely a Christian Right issue," she says darkly. "Just go to the Christian Right Web page and you'll see vouchers are one of their top priorities." (Christian Right Web page? "I don't remember the name of it," she says.)

Frankel is a trial lawyer by training and a notoriously unpleasant person. She is also the new Democratic minority leader in the House. She is, in other words, in a perfect position to cause Jeb Bush a great deal of trouble a year from now. She doesn't sound like she plans to. Frankel doesn't agree with Bush's politics, but she is not out to get him. "He's a very nice man, very congenial, very likable, very charismatic," she says, brightening at the thought. "You could see how he got elected." And how he governs. ♦

The New York Times, May 28, 1999

Turnaround in Texas Schools Looks Good for Bush in 2000

By ETHAN BRONNER

On a rundown road in this sprawling border city, the Castaneda Elementary School, built in 1965 for the children of Mexican migrant workers, is still housed in its original portable buildings. All of its 360 pupils are Mexican-American; a majority arrive not knowing English and a quarter spend several months a year on the road with their working parents.

Yet last year, 90 percent of Castaneda's third graders passed the state's standardized test of academic skills, putting it among the state's top schools. Many other schools are not far behind. In 1998, 76 percent of third graders in Texas passed the test, up from 58 percent in 1994.

And on national examinations, Texan schoolchildren have begun to show up their peers in other states. The trend has become so consistent that Texas' public school system, long among the nation's most troubled, is viewed today by educators as an emerging model of equity, progress and accountability.

It is a remarkable turnaround for a school system that is more than half black and Hispanic, and the causes and effects are being debated around the country. Few would dispute that children are the chief beneficiaries. But with a Presidential election next year, there will very likely be another beneficiary, Gov. George W. Bush, at the moment the Republicans' best hope for taking control of the White House.

While Mr. Bush cannot take full credit for the turnaround -- and he does not try to -- his record on education in Texas shows that some credit will rightfully accrue to him.

He readily acknowledges that the improvements in the system were well under way when he came into office in 1995. But he and others point to his enhancement of the system -- his firm support for accountability, his nonideological approach, his initiative on early reading -- as evidence of his ability to lead, manage and unite disparate factions at a time when education is emerging as the most significant domestic political issue in the nation.

The Texas school system is not without detractors. Some educators complain that it puts too much emphasis on standardized tests; others assert that the tests are too easy, and still others say that the system permits too much state control. But for now most educators offer praise.

"People from outside come to me and say, 'He represents the big money interests of Republicans everywhere,' " said Susana Navarro, executive director of the El Paso Collaborative for Academic Excellence, a nonprofit group in El Paso. "But all I can say is that in Texas with regard to education, George Bush has managed to maintain the sort of system that insures attention, support and achievement for minority and poor kids. While he has been Governor, the gap between minorities and whites has closed rather remarkably."

This has stemmed partly from a unique accountability system that predates Mr. Bush's tenure and requires all Texas schools to give an array of standardized tests and record the results for each subgroup -- white, black, Hispanic and economically disadvantaged. The schools are judged on the performance of each group separately. Other states give tests but no other uses the performance of subgroups separately to determine success.

Building on System Already in Place

When Mr. Bush was elected in November 1994, the accountability system, an initiative of the Education Commissioner of his Democratic predecessor, Ann W. Richards, was still new. Some feared that he would dismantle the system. Instead, they say, he has strengthened it.

"In a relatively short period of time, the whole culture of education has changed in Texas," said Prof. Richard F. Elmore of the Graduate School of

Education at Harvard University. "Today, kids of color and poor kids there are fully expected to learn."

On the last nationally administered mathematics test for fourth graders, the 1996 National Assessment of Educational Progress, black Texans ranked first among all black fourth graders in the country, white Texans ranked first among white fourth graders and Hispanic Texans ranked sixth.

This was in marked contrast to states with similar populations: California's black fourth graders ranked 36th, and New York's Hispanic fourth graders ranked 30th.

National reading tests in 1998 again showed Texas ahead of the pack. Black fourth graders in Texas were ranked 9th nationally and white fourth graders were 2d.

And a report last November by the National Education Goals Panel, a group that tracks education across the country, cited Texas and North Carolina for their rapid gains.

Texas' test gains do not follow any notable increase in investment in the education system, though its teacher/pupil ratio, 15.3 to 1, puts it ahead of the national average of 17.3. The state's other vital education statistics, such as spending per pupil, are slightly below the national average.

In an interview in his office in Austin -- glass cases of signed baseballs against one wall recall his recent ownership of the Texas Rangers -- Mr. Bush emphasized his new legislative proposals intended to have every third grader reading at grade level. He said research showed that after third grade, catching up was much harder for pupils who fell behind.

Among the proposals, most of which have been approved by the Legislature, is one calling for five days of training for every teacher in kindergarten through third grade. The Legislature has already approved $18.8 million to carry out the training this summer, with $30.8 million more expected to be allocated for it next summer.

If, as expected, the Legislature passes the rest of Mr. Bush's plan in the current session, all third graders would be required to pass a reading test to move to fourth grade starting in 2003. Many states are talking about ending the practice of advancing children to the next grade irrespective of their academic skills, but Texas would be among the first to accompany that policy with a program of early intervention.

"I came from the ultimate results-oriented world, which is major league baseball," Mr. Bush said. "Every day we saw the score. Texas has a very good accountability system that began to develop thanks to others who preceded me. I have worked hard to strengthen it, to continue to raise the bar."

The implications for education of a Bush Presidency are vague. The Governor has so far declined to lay out any specific ideas for a national education policy, advocating state and local control. That puts some distance between him and Vice President Al Gore, who recently called for an ambitious Federal policy that would make preschool universally available and offer grants of $10,000 to college graduates willing to spend four years teaching in troubled schools.

Mr. Bush says he is not sure what role a President or the Federal Government should play in education. He mentions the "bully pulpit" and the need to press for sound research and accountability systems that rely on testing and clear goals. He says, when asked, that he may be open to the use of Federal money as a means of persuasion, something President Clinton also advocates.

Mr. Bush has upset liberals with his support of using public money to send children to private schools, but that support has not been especially vigorous , and Texas has not instituted a system of vouchers for private schools.

The key to the Texas accountability system since it was instituted in 1991 has been the relentless focus on testing. Every year, from third through eighth grade and once again in high school, virtually every Texas public school pupil takes a version of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills, known to all in the state as TAAS. The results, along with school attendance figures, determine a school's rating in the state.

In some districts, the administration of the skills test is viewed as the end of an annual campaign, rather like the homecoming football game, in which every pupil is a player. Students train with pep rallies and inspirational speeches; posters plaster the walls; those who pass are rewarded with parties and full days at amusement parks.

Critics Question All the Testing

The approach is not universally admired. It is opposed by the religious right because it is seen as a centralized curriculum, and by some on the left for the fact that minority children do less well than whites and by other parents and educators who say "teaching to the test" distorts the learning process.

"In many years, all my daughters' teachers have done is drill them for TAAS instead of giving creative writing or interesting projects," said Susan Monsees, an Austin dental hygienist, whose two daughters are in the ninth and fifth grades.

"The system may look good on paper, but I feel my daughters are getting ripped off," Ms. Monsees said.

A few advocates of minority rights worry about reliance on standardized tests because black and Hispanic students historically do less well on them. The Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund is suing the State of Texas over the high school skills test, which students must pass to graduate.

"Some say governments shouldn't measure because that is too much government control," Mr. Bush said. "Some say it is racist to test. I strongly say it is racist not to test because by not testing we don't know and by not knowing we are just moving children through the system."

Mr. Bush argues that the success is the result of "the simple application of principles" that could apply to running a business: clear, easy-to-understand and measurable goals, staying focused on a few things and doing them well.

His analogy to business is significant. Texas' success, most analysts agree, stems from a sustained interest in education by the state's business leaders, which began in 1983 when a panel headed by Ross Perot made recommendations. Many were passed by the Legislature, setting the stage for the improvements to come. These included reducing class sizes in first through fourth grades and reallocating state education money so that poorer districts received a larger share.

Making Sure Minorities Succeeded

To make sure the minority pupils were part of the advance, superintendents, principals and teachers were allowed to pursue the goal of having their pupils pass the skills test as they saw fit, a management approach that Mr. Bush considers vital to the improved test scores.

At the Roosevelt Elementary School in north Houston, where only 8 percent of the children are white, Charlotte Parker, the principal, requires each child to hand in a writing sample every two weeks. Ninety percent of Ms. Parker's pupils, many of them in bilingual education, now pass the skills test.

In fact, the use of bilingual education is noteworthy, another example of Mr. Bush's avoiding traditional Republican education politics. Last June, California banned the use of bilingual education, a move applauded by many Republican leaders.

Texas not only permits bilingual education, many of its schools are planning to increase its use so that students who leave classes taught in Spanish for those taught in English maintain their fluency and literacy as they get into the upper elementary grades. Mr. Bush said he favored "what works" and as long as children learned English and proved, through their test scores, their English proficiency, he had no objection to the use of bilingual education.

It has worked in border cities like Brownsville. Superintendent Wallace Jackson said that six years ago, based on the skills test, the Brownsville school district had 11 low-performing schools out of 43. Today there are none.

At Lopez High School in Brownsville, Sylvia Senteno, the dean of instruction, said that "for 30 years, no one cared how many kids dropped out." Today, since school ratings depend partly on attendance and reducing dropout rates, Ms. Senteno said, "we do everything we can to keep kids in school so as to avoid lowering our rating."

"We visit their homes," she said. "We have improved the food. We greet the kids when they arrive, even hand out free pencils if we get them, anything to show them we miss them when they are not here."

This year, Ms. Senteno said, only 5 seniors failed the skills test. Three years ago, there were 70.

WEST COAST DISPATCH

Board Game

THE LATEST LESSON of California politics is that Republican millionaires spend their money smarter than Democratic ones do. Al Checchi, the former Northwest Airlines titan, poured $40 million down a rathole in a vanity run for governor last year. Now, wealthy Los Angeles Mayor Richard Riordan is poised to shake up L.A.'s failing school district with a mere $270,000. That was Riordan's personal contribution to the $2 million his Coalition for Kids has raised to bankroll a reform slate of four candidates in the bellwether school-board election on April 13.

Modeled on a widely hailed overthrow of Sacramento's moribund board two years ago, the coalition's campaign scrambles all the rules of traditionally union-dominated school races. Riordan's slate of three challengers and one incumbent will outspend opponents by as much as four to one and could emerge with a working majority on the seven-member board. If it works, the campaign could prompt other reformers to make these backwater races a community-based alternative to the kind of state-directed school takeovers seen in cities like Chicago and Detroit.

Riordan's commitment to education is deep. The former venture capitalist has given $25 million to school projects over the years, much of it in Los Angeles. He's sprinkled computer labs across the city and funded model after-school programs that the state itself is now expanding. But such efforts could do only so much to help the nation's second-largest school system. Just consider its current litany of woes. Two-thirds of L.A. third-graders can't read at grade level. The dropout rate is more than twice the state average. SAT scores are nearly 13 percent below the state average and have fallen in the past decade. School libraries have five books per pupil, versus a national average of 20. One in four L.A. teachers lacks proper credentials. Next fall, when the district ends the practice of "social promotion," up to 60 percent of affected kids are in danger of flunking.

Moreover, despite soaring enrollment, just two new high schools have been built since 1971. And the big new high school project currently under way—Belmont, west of downtown—is already a classic white elephant: it sits atop an old oil field. With cost estimates topping $200 million, the most expensive high school in state, if not human, history now drowns in toxic cleanup fights, lavish cost overruns, and an orgy of finger-pointing. Belmont, which may never open, is a metaphor for chronic mismanagement in Los Angeles; the school district spends nine percent more per pupil than the rest of California, but just 60 cents of every dollar reaches the classroom.

Yet, the school board, which Riordan says is stocked with "wannabe politicians who are in it for their first power base," lacks any sense of urgency. Three of four school-board incumbents, when asked by the *Los Angeles Times* whether the system was in crisis, said "no."

Like many U.S. mayors, Riordan has little clout in the classroom, thanks to school districts' nineteenth-century origin as separate taxing entities, plus Horace Mann's well-meaning (if naïve) push to keep schools out of municipal politics. But, as urban woes have mounted, so has the need to act. And, in Los Angeles, the kind of authority Illinois gave Chicago Mayor Richard Daley seems politically impractical. Unlike Chicago, L.A.'s "unified" school district is bigger than the city itself; neighboring mayors won't let Riordan annex their schools.

So Riordan, unable to reform the school board from above, is trying to fix it from below. There's certainly a lot to fix. As a study by L.A.'s blue-ribbon Committee on Effective School Governance found, well-run boards (like Philadelphia's or Chicago's) meet monthly to review a handful of priorities tied to raising student achievement. L.A.'s board, however, meets every week, often from one o'clock in the afternoon until midnight. Members spend hours second-guessing principal assignments, helping parents get their kids' schedules changed, and poring over expenses worth less than one-thousandth of one percent of a $6.5 billion budget. Not even cafeteria menus or bathrooms escape scrutiny. One educator watched in amazement a few years ago as board members corralled the superintendent at an awards luncheon and dictated an afternoon "to do" list of constituent errands "as if he was a personal assistant to each one of them."

Despite this dysfunction, board members usually scare off challengers by raising as much as $150,000 from the system's teachers, principals, contractors, and service workers. But not this year. With the help of Riordan's $2 million—most of which came from a $1,000-per-plate reception he gave with his wife, tapping the same business pals active in the mayor's other causes, like charter reform—two of his candidates may each spend $600,000 or more, astonishing sums for a school race. Bill Carrick, a heavyweight consultant who ran the mayor's own races, is handling Riordan's candidates. He's blanketing CNN, ESPN, and other cable channels with school-board ads for the first time.

The teachers' union actually backs two of Riordan's four candidates and cheers his aims. Still, "it's a little frightening," says union president Day Higuchi, "that a little oligarchy can orchestrate" these changes. Potential conflicts abound. Eli Broad, for example, a big investor in the NFL franchise the city hopes to lure, has given $250,000 to Riordan's coalition at a time when the NFL deal hinges on millions of pending city subsidies.

A bigger concern is whether Riordan's candidates offer a coherent agenda. The mayor says he wants schools governed by a big-picture board of directors, but the one incumbent he's backing, David Tokofsky, is a legendary meddler. Meanwhile, another incumbent, Jeff Horton, has staked out positions seemingly in line with Riordan's, like tying teacher pay to student results—a stand that helped cost him the teachers' endorsement. Yet Riordan opposes him with Caprice Young, a 33-year-old former city hall aide who's considered thoughtful but utterly inexperienced in the schools.

Still, whatever its flaws, Riordan's effort could put a national spotlight on urban school boards as catalysts for change. Every big-city school shakeup in recent years has required either legislation from above or a court order. School-board races—with their relatively low costs and, in Los Angeles, paltry 15 percent turnout—are fertile ground for determined reformers with cash in hand. The Christian Coalition proved school boards could be an effective battleground for cultural conservatives, especially in suburbs and small towns in the South and Midwest. Riordan's revolt—if successful—would adapt the same strategy to secular aims.

In Los Angeles, at least, time may be running out. Without results soon, everything from the Valley secession movement to vouchers is sure to get a stronger hearing. Says *Los Angeles Times* editorial page editor Janet Clayton: "This is really the last best chance for the school district."

MATTHEW MILLER

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Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, April 7, 1999

All 5 union allies fall in MPS races: Heated contests a victory for reform

BY JOE WILLIAMS

All five School Board candidates endorsed by the Milwaukee teachers union including three incumbents were defeated Tuesday in an election the union attempted to frame as a referendum on school choice.

Incumbent John Gardner, the union's fiercest foe, crushed challenger Theadoll Taylor in the citywide race that generated the most attention and as much as $500,000 in spending.

The Milwaukee Teachers' Education Association ran television ads and circulated costly fliers attacking Gardner, but did little to promote the credentials of Taylor, a retired MPS principal.

"This is not a defeat for the MTEA," Gardner said at a campaign celebration at the east side home of board member Bruce Thompson. "It is a defeat for the six arrogant white men from the suburbs who think they run the union. They are going to have to start listening to their members or look for new jobs."

As much as Tuesday's vote was a victory for Gardner and the slate of reform candidates, it was also a victory for Mayor John O. Norquist. Norquist last year successfully fought off state efforts to take over the school system by saying voters were close to getting a quality School Board.

"This is a great victory," Norquist said Tuesday night. "I think the people of Milwaukee want to have a School Board that will focus on improving MPS and making it a place where people will want to put their kids. It's a real opportunity."

Taylor, who raised considerably less money than Gardner, did not appear to benefit from the MTEA's big spending against her opponent. Taylor ran on her experience in the system and what she said was a commitment to lower class sizes in city schools. She frequently criticized Gardner for his support of school choice and charter schools.

Turnout at the polls was about 16%, much lower than what had been projected earlier. City Elections Board Chairman Robert Spindell said that statistics were still being compiled, but that it appeared turnout was particularly low in inner-city wards.

The teachers union has generally been considered the beneficiary of low turnout elections in Milwaukee because of the union's ability to get its members to the polls. Several of the victorious candidates Tuesday said that they had more support from teachers than it appeared from the official endorsements.

Gardner and several of the winners agreed there was considerable work to be done.

In his first term on the boa rd, Gardner was an outspoken critic of the status quo in MPS. He was part of a vocal minority that sought to get more MPS money to the school level, closer to students, and fought to make parents more of a force in decision-making.

He now w ill be joined by four other newcomers all elected to four-year terms who share many of his beliefs. Not joining him will be his frequent opponents on the

board: Leon Todd, Joe Fisher and Sandra Small.

The slate of five that won Tuesday will remain in office for four years. The four other sitting board members, Warren Braun, Bruce Thompson, Lawrence O'Neil and Charlene Hardin, are up for re-election in 2001.

A look at Tuesday's district races:

District 1, northwest side: Challenger Donald Werra, a former police captain, squeaked out a victory over board President Joe Fisher, a retired teacher, in this district that is heavily populated by police officers and teachers.

Werra is chief of public safety f or the Milwaukee Housing Authority.

Fisher, a former MTEA official, said he'd like to create a new school for disruptive students, along the lines of a reform school. He also said he'd push for the expansion of a statewide program to reduce class sizes.

Werra's strongest message was in school safety, suggesting that teachers couldn't teach unless schools were safe and secure.

District 2, northern west side: Incumbent Sandra Small, who served on the board since 1991, was clobbered by challenger Jeff Spence.

"Talk about a referendum on educating the kids here in this city," Spence said Tuesday night. "I think this was a clear sign that people want change."

Spence, an administrative t for the sewerage district, has been involved in decision-making at the two schools his sons attend, Hi-Mount and Golda Meir. He said that some of Small's decisions, such as supporting the teachers union contract for 1997-'99, had been detrimental to children.

Small is chair of the committee overseeing innovations and school reform. She works in a women's clothing store and was a leader in city PTA activities when her daughter, now an adult, was in school. She said during the campaign t hat she had played a role in launching many changes in MPS and she wanted to see these reforms through to completion.

District 3, north side: Incumbent Leon Todd was ousted by challenger Ken Johnson, who led one of the most aggressive grass -roots campaigns in the city.

Johnson, a journeyman electrician, raised more money than Todd and blanketed the north side district with volunteers and literature. He had the support of former MPS Superintendent Howard Fuller and local business leaders.

"I think the 3rd District tonight said, finally, we would like our voice to be heard," Johnson said. "This is fantastic. This is a great day for Milwaukee."

Todd is a self-employed business consultant who has had a knack for diving headfirst into controversial issues. Johnson accused him during the campaign of operating more like a citywide School Board member and neglecting the district.

Todd attracted considerable attention this spring for his plan to seek laptop computers for the city's 24,000 high school students. Some praised him for the plan; others criticized its merits. On both sides, the laptops became a hot campaign issue.

District 8, south side: Joe Dannecker beat MTEA-backed Stephen Latin-Kasper in a race that featured two newcomers to MPS politics.

The seat had been held by Christine Sinicki, who was elected to the state Legislature last fall.

Dannecker, an attorney in private practice, said he felt the School Board had not operated in an effective manner and his principal stand was that a better working environment was needed to surround decision-making in the district. He called for more of the budget to be spent on classroom activities.

Latin-Kasper, an economist for a trade association, is strongly opposed to the use of private companies in public schools, a position dear to the MTEA, and said he wanted to see more effort put into building parental involvement in schools.

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Selected Readings on School Reform

Federal Policy

Ah, spring in Washington. Cherry blossoms, wildflowers, bad allergies, and an all-out war to redefine the federal role in education.

Two events—the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and the budding 2000 presidential campaign—have combined to create a cascade of federal policy proposals. We bring you some of the more important.

First up is Vice President Gore's plan for American education. Ethan Bronner, in his *New York Times* article "Gore Seizes Education as Campaign Platform," describes Gore's commencement address at Graceland College (in Iowa, of course). Billed as Gore's first major policy speech, it delivered a truckload of new programs. Among the more provocative issues he tackled: ending teaching tenure. Mostly, though, he sketched an activist role for Uncle Sam.

A few days later, President Clinton unveiled his administration's long-awaited ESEA proposal. Called the "Educational Excellence Act for All Children Act" by its drafters, Anna Bray Duff refers to it as "Clinton's Education Power Grab," in her *Investor's Business Daily* account. The news wasn't the new programs contained in the White House proposal (though there are some) but its focus on "accountability." In return for their federal dollars, school districts and states would have to revise their standards, promotion, discipline, and teacher certification policies in line with administration thinking.

What to make of these Clinton-Gore proposals? Our own Checker Finn explains in his *Weekly Standard* piece "The Education Vice President." Finn admits that these ideas make a great deal of *political* sense. Voters are hungry for better schools, seem copacetic with the feds taking charge, and want politicians speaking a language they can relate to (smaller classes, better teachers) rather than in vague notions (competition, flexibility). Nevertheless, both plans are policy disasters. Finn tells us why.

Let us return to Vice President Gore. Christopher Caldwell of *The Weekly Standard* explains in "Gore Curriculum" the unfortunate circumstances of the "resignation" of federal statistics commissioner Pat Forgione. Forgione, among others, criticized the Vice President for politicizing the release of the 1998 NAEP reading results. A few months later, Forgione was told that he would not be reappointed to this non-political post. In our view, it's a blooming outrage, a threat to the integrity of federal education statistics, and the loss of an able public servant.

Want to keep up-to-date on the ever-changing federal policy landscape? Check out our website (www.edexcellence.net) on a regular basis. There you will find recent testimonies by Finn, Diane Ravitch, Marci Kanstoroom and others, as well as analyses of proposals floated by both parties.

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The New York Times, May 17, 1999

Gore Seizes Education as Campaign Platform

By ETHAN BRONNER
The New York Times

In what political aides described as his first policy speech of the Presidential campaign, Vice President Al Gore called today for "revolutionary change" and substantial Federal investment in education. He advocated universally available preschool for 3- and 4-year-olds, the creation of a teachers corps of new graduates for neglected schools, rigorous tests for new teachers, the elimination of large high schools and legal protection allowing parents to leave work to visit their children's teachers during the workday.

Speaking at a college graduation ceremony in southern Iowa a day after opening his campaign headquarters in Des Moines, Mr. Gore said education was the key to meeting the country's economic, social and moral challenges.

"Let us realize that education is the greatest anti-poverty program," he said, "the most powerful anti-discrimination strategy we could ever have." He referred to international comparisons showing American high school students to be far below those of many other countries, and he asked, "How long can we stay first in making new discoveries if we stay dead last, out of all countries surveyed, in physics?"

While the Vice President's proposals reflect a growing consensus among educators and contain elements found in legislative plans at the state and Federal level, certain aspects are new in a Presidential campaign, notably the call for a universal preschool and the commitment for a teachers corps.

Though southern Iowa is not a Democratic stronghold, the Vice President was warmly received at Graceland College, a conservative Christian institution affiliated with the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. His comments about high-quality preschool and elevating the teaching profession drew enthusiastic applause, as did his assertion of the need for renewed focus on discipline, values and safety in schools, all signs that focusing his domestic agenda on education will meet with public approval.

While the education goals of the two major parties often seem to resemble each other -- higher standards, better teachers, improved safety -- a principal distinction between Republicans and Democrats has been the opposition of Republicans to involving the Federal Government in education. Republicans favor local control and local standards and say Federal control will create unwieldy, costly bureaucracies.

Lamar Alexander, a Republican and former Education Secretary who is hoping to gain his party's Presidential nomination, reacted to Mr. Gore's speech by saying it was the "right church, wrong pew."

From his hometown, Maryville, Tenn., where he was a giving a college graduation speech, Mr. Alexander dismissed the Vice President's proposals as "adding up to a national school board." Mr. Alexander said that instead of creating more Federal education programs, Federal dollars should be sent back to local school boards, parents and teachers to let them decide what is best for their students.

But in his speech, Mr. Gore said: "Some say there is no national role in helping communities improve their schools. I say that education is our No. 1 national priority for investing in the future. And we must take dramatic steps to help

states and communities provide a quality education for their children."

Neither Mr. Gore nor his aides would put a price on his new proposals, but they said all of it would fit within a balanced budget.

Mr. Gore divided his proposal into seven recommendations: provide preschool for all children; improve teacher quality partly through creation of a federally subsidized teachers corps; renew the focus on discipline and safety; fundamentally reduce the size of high schools; turn around failing schools; improve technology for schools, and create a tax-free savings plan for parents and grandparents to pay for college.

Mr. Gore said the teachers corps graduates would have to pass a rigorous test, and he advocated the same test for all new teachers as well as five-year evaluations of teachers for license renewal.

"No teaching license should be a lifetime guarantee," Mr. Gore said. But he emphasized that teachers, a traditional support group for Democrats, deserve respect. "When I see politicians bash our teachers," he said, "I have to wonder: How long would they last in a classroom with 24 14-year-olds?"

Sandra Feldman, president of the American Federation of Teachers, hailed the Vice President's speech, saying she supported Mr. Gore's calls for new tests and evaluations to improve the quality of teachers.

For pupils with discipline problems, Mr. Gore advocated the creation of second-chance schools where troubled youngsters and those caught with guns "can receive the strict discipline and intensive services they need." In many of the nation's biggest cities, troubled students are simply expelled.

To avoid producing many such students, Mr. Gore offered a proposal: that parents, teachers and students meet on the first day of school every year to agree on and sign a discipline code. This would increase ties between parents and schools, he said.

He added that parents must be given the legal right to take time off from work for that and for subsequent teacher meetings. Aides said that protection would come through extension of the Federal Family and Medical Leave Act.

Mr. Gore said he favored increasing the ability of parents to choose a public school for their children outside their neighborhoods but opposed the use of vouchers supported by public money to send children to private schools. Vouchers are favored by many Republican candidates as a way to expand school choice and instill competition in the system. Mr. Gore said that would siphon public school financing.

Mr. Gore ended by calling for a National Tuition Savings program bringing together disparate state plans for tax-free savings for college by parents and grandparents. He also urged that employers help employees save, tax-free, for college and job training.

Investor's Business Daily, May 20, 1999

Clinton's Education Power Grab

By ANNA BRAY DUFF
Investor's Business Daily

If you thought the era of big government was over, just wait until you see President Clinton's plan to revamp K-12 public schools.

On Wednesday, Clinton put forth a plan to impose strict new regulations on school districts and states receiving federal funds for education.

The plan details the administration's goals on everything from setting class size to fighting obesity, from setting teacher qualifications to requiring mental-health tests for gun-toting students.

But the plan's most important - and potentially most controversial - elements would force states and school districts to meet federal standards on teacher qualifications, class size and accountability.

Clinton's plan also sets the stage for a possible showdown with Congress, where Republican leaders have been pushing programs to give states and school districts more flexibility in how they use federal dollars. They argue the past 30 years - in which the federal government has taken a bigger role in regulating public schools - haven't seen improvements in education.

"This is a huge federal power grab," said Chester Finn, president of the Fordham Foundation and former assistant secretary of Education. "It is amazingly audacious in its reach over schools. I can't even imagine the regulatory apparatus needed to police some of these things."

This year, Congress has to renew the 34-year-old Elementary and Secondary Education Act or it will expire. The ESEA governs how states and school districts use nearly $ 12 billion in federal education funds each year.

"If we are going to change the way our schools work, we must change the way we invest federal aid in our schools," Clinton said at a press conference Wednesday.

But the administration's approach would do little to change how money is spent. Rather, it would change what states and school districts have to do to get the money in the first place.

How much will all this cost? The administration's rough estimate is $ 50 billion over the next five years, although few of the proposals had specific price tags attached.

That means the programs could cost much more, some observers say.

"This was a major opportunity for Washington to rethink its role in education," said Donald McAdams, a member of Houston's school board. "But this bill is the same old thinking that Washington knows best and we need to do it their way even though there is no evidence that their way is working."

Here are some of Clinton's major proposals:

* Teacher qualifications. Under the Clinton plan, all states would have to show that, within four years, at least 95% of teachers have full teacher certificates.

New secondary school teachers -but not existing ones - would be required to pass state tests in their subject area, as well as tests of teaching skills. It would limit the use of teacher's aides and emergency teaching certificates.

* Title I funds for high-poverty schools. School districts receiving Title I funds - roughly half of all districts -would be required to make their schools uniform across the district. All schools would have to have the same teacher-student ratios and teacher qualifications, as well as similar curricula, course offerings and instructional materials.

* Accountability. States would be "encouraged" to develop a single system for holding all schools accountable for improving student performance.

States would have to publicly identify low-performing districts. They'd also have to help or to shut down low-performing schools that don't improve in at least three years. States would also have to publish schoolwide

"report cards" listing information such as graduation rates, student achievement and teacher qualifications.

* Social promotion. The plan would also require schools to end the practice of social promotion, which lets students who haven't mastered certain subjects get passed to the next grade.

Still, Clinton said that schools must do this "not by holding students back, but by making sure they have the support to meet the higher standards."

While some criticized the plan for taking too much control over schools, others thought its approach was too timid.

Amy Wilkens, senior researcher at the Education Trust, argues the new federal requirements for teacher standards aren't high enough.

"The standards only apply to new teachers, which will leave the bulk of the teaching force untouched," she said. "The second problem is that the new standards are pretty much the status quo, what states already require. It won't change anything."

Wilkens does back the requirement that states test teachers in the subjects they teach. "Content knowledge is directly linked to student achievement," she said.

It's also unclear how the push for federal standards for teachers will work with the plan's mandate to cut class size. The goal is to cut classes in first-grade through third-grade to 18 students. Some states already have a shortage of qualified teachers.

"Federal money is limited, so you really ought to target programs that make the biggest difference first," Wilkens said. "And if you look at bang for the buck, well-qualified teachers trump class size every time."

But Finn argues the administration's approach to teacher quality is misguided. It relies too heavily on teacher certification requirements that have little, if any, link to student achievement.

Overall, the new federal standards will likely make it harder for states to experiment with new approaches to improving teacher quality.

He also argues that requiring uniformity among Title I schools for class size, curriculum and the like will discourage innovation without improving quality.

"It's an archaic approach to quality control," Finn said. "It assumes that by standardizing the inputs of schools, you will have an effect on the results of schools, but we know that's not true. We should be encouraging a diversity of approaches," he said.

"This is worse than ineffective. It's harmful," Finn added.

Federal money makes up only about 7% of total spending on K-12 education. But over the past few decades, it has increasingly bought a disproportionate amount of control over local schools. This would likely increase under Clinton's plan.

In Pennsylvania, for example, federal funding accounts for about 7% of total spending - but takes 33% of the state's Department of Education employees to administer. In Arizona, it takes 45% of state education staffers to administer just 6% of spending.

Paul Hill, a professor at the University of Washington who has been researching Title I for over two decades, argues that federal red tape is only one problem local schools have faced.

Regulations have caused principals to focus on following rules rather than teaching students, Hill says.

In recent months, Congress has taken a small step by enacting the "Ed- Flex" program. Lawmakers say they may try to use a similar approach when they renew the ESEA.

"Republicans and others who value flexibility and local initiatives have a better approach," Rep. Bill Goodling, R- Pa., chairman of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce, said in a statement. "In exchange for flexibility, we will expect results."

Sen. William Roth, R-Del., is proposing to give parents more money to control their children's education. That plan would expand "Education IRAs" so they can be used for elementary and secondary education, not just college, and raise the annual contribution limits. Clinton vetoed a similar plan last year.

Houston's McAdams argues for a more radical approach. "What they ought to be doing is giving a certain amount of money per child and have it follow the child to whatever school he goes to, not giving it to the school system," he said. "Then you hold the school district accountable for results," he said.

"Money can make a big difference in education if you give educators a clear goal and flexibility to meet it," Mc- Adams said. "But this would take taxpayer dollars and wash them down the drain. "

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The Weekly Standard, May 31, 1999

THE EDUCATION VICE PRESIDENT

by Chester E. Finn Jr.

AL GORE IS NO FOOL. He knows that education is on voters' minds and has been a political winner for Bill Clinton. He knows he has no track record as an education reformer. So on May 16, he seized an opportunity—a college commencement address in a tiny Iowa town—to stake out a forceful position on this contentious issue.

His timing was shrewd. No other candidate save former education secretary Lamar Alexander has had much to say on the topic. This placed Gore out front. Then within days, the administration unveiled its massive, draconian scheme to overhaul the federal role in K-12 education, which both boosted interest in the issue and—remarkably—made the veep look like a "good cop" by comparison.

No, Gore's seven points don't add up to a coherent plan. They're more like fine-sounding themes or goals and some nebulous proposals. They rely on a systematic blurring of the line between what a President Gore could have the federal government do and what he could only harangue states and communities to do for themselves.

That distinction makes education a tricky national issue for Republicans. They cannot elide it as easily as Gore. Their affection for the 10th Amendment and local control of schools leaves GOP office-seekers perplexed about how to tackle a nationwide concern without expanding Washington's role. This is a special problem in the primaries, where much of the Republican "base" thinks Uncle Sam should have *nothing* to do with the schools—a fatal stance in the general election. Gore, though, has the good fortune to be a Democrat, and thus joins a long list of politicians who deftly erase the boundary between "national" and "federal." This intellectual dishonesty leads to policy promiscuity, but it also yields seductive speeches and happy audiences.

I wish I had a dollar for every focus group Gore's seven themes were tried out on before he shared them with the Graceland College class of '99. They touch all the bases: better and more professional teachers, universal access to *both* preschool and college, character and values, discipline and safety, computers, school accountability, smaller classes, parent involvement, "turning around" failing schools, and on and on.

It was a good speech, for Gore, and got lots of attention. Had he been running for prime minister of Britain or any other country with a unitary school system and parliamentary government, it might even have been termed an honest speech. Listeners would have understood that he was setting forth the policies of the government he hoped to lead and that, if he

were elected, the education system would change in the stated ways.

In the American context, however, it was basically dishonest, because it was not moored in the reality of what a U.S. president can do. To put any of these proposals into operation from Washington would require congressional assent and budget authority—and a vast expansion of Uncle Sam's involvement in the country's schools.

That prospect seems not to trouble the vice president. He called for widening the Family and Medical Leave Act to make employers excuse parents for all conferences with teachers. He contemplates new tax-exempt savings accounts "for job training, education, and lifelong learning." He wants Washington to give a $10,000 scholarship to anyone who agrees "to spend four years teaching in a school that needs your help" provided they also "pass a rigorous exam."

Very shrewd. Gore responds to widespread anxiety about teachers' competence—and the popularity of making them demonstrate their knowledge—while offering more money to teachers, yet limits both test and reward to those who serve in needy, tough, urban schools. Along the way, he would have the federal government intrude as never before into decisions about what teachers should know and which schools need which teachers. But never mind.

Other vice presidential proposals are vaguer. It's impossible to determine whom he expects to do what to bring them about. Thus: "We should provide bonuses to all teachers in schools where students have made significant gains. . . . We need a renewed focus on discipline, character, the right values, and safety. . . . We should increase our commitment to after-school care. . . . We should provide incentives to create smaller high schools. . . . We need to make summer school much more widely available." And on and on.

Those vague promises, however, are the good cop speaking. A few days later, education secretary Richard Riley unveiled the Clinton administration's plan to overhaul the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and Goals 2000 program. Congress last reworked these huge statutes just before the Republican victory of 1994, and at the time critics termed them a worrisome expansion of federal control over the nation's schools.

Well, hold onto your hat and lock your children up some place safe. The era of big government is back with a vengeance. So far as one can tell from Riley's remarks and Education Department press releases—the hundreds of pages of fine print are not yet public—we are looking at an epochal enlargement of federal control of U.S. schools. Not since the heyday of the federal courts' incursions into school management in the name of desegregation have we seen anything like this Potomac power grab.

Gore would have the federal government intrude as never before into decisions about what teachers should know and which schools need which teachers.

But the lever this time is not enforcement of constitutional rights. It's the lure of federal dollars. The administration is saying that states and communities that want to keep getting their share of the $12 billion or so in school aid that flows each year from Washington must henceforth obey many more rules that flow from Washington. The operative phrases in the Department's 17-page handout are "require states" and "states must."

The new requirements are breathtaking in their audacity. In the name of "fairness," for example, Riley would require all the schools in a district to have "equivalent pupil-teacher ratios, their teachers [to] have equal qualifications, and the curriculum, instructional materials, range of courses and the condition of safety of school facilities all must be comparable." He doesn't mean "comparable" as in "able to be compared." He means identical, uniform, equal, unvarying.

In the name of "qualified" teachers, the administration would require every state to ensure that 95 percent of its instructors are "fully certified"—that is, products of the teacher-education cartel—leaving districts and charter schools even less leeway to hire other people who might do a better job.

In the name of a "stimulating, career-long learning environment for teachers," the administration would require every district to set aside 10 percent of its Title I funding for "professional development." In other words, take $800 million a year out of direct services to low income children and spend it instead on the motley array of prosperous hucksters, itinerant experts, and mediocre ed schools that dispense "in-service education."

In the name of orderly schools, the administration

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would "require states to hold school districts and schools accountable for having discipline policies that focus on prevention, are consistent and fair." Imagine the regulatory apparatus that will be needed to see whether 50 states have done this satisfactorily in 16,000 local districts and 85,000 public schools. But it's even more complicated, for the White House is sensitive to concerns that tough discipline will actually lead to troublesome kids' being kicked out of school. So yet another provision would require states "to ensure that schools have a plan to help students who are expelled or suspended continue to meet the challenging state standards." Think of it as the Bureau of High Standards for Bad Kids.

Were all this and more to happen, the U.S. secretary of education would become the national superintendent of schools. Reform-minded governors and mayors might as well fold their education tents. Advocates of education improvement via school diversity and competition would face a historic setback. Parents—while they may find themselves required to become more "involved" with their children's schools—will have ever less say in their kids' education. And Al Gore will be made a more honest man, for the country whose presidency he seeks will have an education system far more like the unitary, nationalized, government-run versions of other lands.

One would like to say that the education battle lines are being drawn in Washington, but it's doubtful the GOP will mount a coherent counterattack. Congressional leaders' initial response to the Clinton plan has been, "Yes, but." There is no sign of effective leadership on this issue on the Republican side of the aisle. After an initial flurry of attention, the country's energetic "education governors" seem to have surrendered the field. Although the "Super Ed-Flex" idea—giving a handful of states greater freedom with their federal dollars in return for evidence of improved pupil achievement—is attracting some interest on Capitol Hill, it is already being compromised with conditions, set-asides, and hold-harmless provisions that will render it practically meaningless.

Just as Gore is gambling that, when it comes to education, voters prefer action to inaction and concrete programs to quibbles about federalism, so are Clinton and Riley assuming that the country is ready for an activist government to take charge of the schools. Sixteen years after being declared a "nation at risk," the United States still provides a K-12 education that is perilously weak. The Democrats have decided that the public is weary of false starts and excuses and is prepared to let Washington run things, maybe even to reward politicians who promise vigor. For their part—to their great shame and likely political cost—the Republicans still cannot explain what a better approach would be.

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The Weekly Standard, June 7, 1999

GORE CURRICULUM

by Christopher Caldwell

PASCAL FORGIONE WITNESSED A HIJACKING and it cost him his job. Last February 10, Forgione, who heads the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), was due at an Education Department press conference to announce the results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), a periodic measure of school performance that he administers. These are generally low-key events, since policy forbids partisan comment on the data until the center's bureaucrats can present them dispassionately to the public. This time, however, there was a last-minute change of plan. Reporters who usually cover the education beat found themselves roped off at the back of the auditorium. The best seats were taken by hundreds of administration-friendly lobbyists and Education Department activists. Standing at the front of the room to announce the results and take credit was Al Gore himself.

Turning a non-partisan announcement into a campaign rally would have been an abuse even if the vice president had not misrepresented the data. But he did that, too, claiming big gains in reading scores since 1994, linking the improvement to Clinton administration policies, and drawing wild cheers from the assembled claque. He did not mention that the 1994 scores had shown a precipitous drop-off since the last measures of the Bush administration in 1992, and that the new NAEP ratings remained below their 1992 highs. Once Gore had blown out of the room—without taking a single question—the task of unsaying much of what he had just said fell to Forgione and Mark D. Musick, chairman of the National Assessment Governing Board, which draws up the NAEP tests.

The incident might have ended there, but Musick was infuriated. He wrote a letter to Forgione commiserating over Gore's hijacking of the NAEP announcement. "We believe," Musick wrote, "that the format, tone and substance of that event was not consistent with the principle of an independent, non-partisan release of National Assessment data." Unless such non-partisanship could be assured, Musick wrote, "it eventually won't matter how much attention is paid to the results; people won't believe them."

The letter leaked. In March, *Los Angeles Times* reporter Ricardo Alonso-Zaldívar described Gore's stunt as symptomatic of two devious tendencies. First, to steal credit for policy initiatives he didn't develop. Second, to politicize parts of the bureaucracy that have been set up to be beyond partisan politics. Forgione, who had devoted his career to educational testing—as Connecticut's head of assessment, Delaware's state schools superintendent, and executive director of the National Education Goals Program—popped off. He told the L.A. writer that interventions such as Gore's "can cloud the confidence people might have in the independence of the data." He added, "This should not happen again." Then he told *Education Week* that repeating such a charade would damage NAEP's credibility.

Sayonara, Pascal Forgione. In mid-April, Forgione was told that his four-year appointment, which expires on June 21, would not be renewed. It's not surprising that he burst into tears when he told his employees he'd be leaving—everyone around him was stunned. Forgione was popular and had upped the NCES's budget. He had won praise for an extension of the Third International Math and Science Study. The Advisory Council on Education Statistics, an elite group of statisticians that advises the Education Department, recommended that Forgione stay on; Andy Porter, the council's chairman, called his departure a "tremendous loss." Education Secretary Richard Riley, too, urged his reappointment. That he was not kept on in the face of such endorsements means the decision to oust him came from the White House. A number of education newsletters, particularly *Education Daily*, discerned a link between Forgione's appeal for nonpartisan statistics and his unsuitability for further employment in the Clinton-Gore administration.

But then Forgione's enemies came forth with what they said

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was the *real* explanation for his ouster. For eight consecutive years, it seems, Forgione filed for extensions on his federal income taxes. In seven of those years, he missed the August 15 fallback deadline. He would file his taxes towards the end of the year and collect a refund from the IRS, which he would use to pay his children's college tuition. Forgione referred to this as forced savings; the White House looked at it as an "appearance of impropriety" that could sidetrack its "commitment to education."

There are problems with this White House line. First, the Department of Education had been fully aware of the practice when Forgione was nominated and confirmed. Second, none of the Republicans on the House Education and the Workforce committee showed the slightest discomfort with Forgione's means of paying his taxes. That's because, while Forgione's practice may have been eccentric, there was absolutely nothing unethical or illegal about it. It is illegal to pay taxes late; but as long as the government owes the taxpayer money, there's no crime in *filing for your refund* late. Nobody interviewed for this article—Republican or Democrat; in Congress or the Ed Department or the private sector—believes Forgione was fired for his tax problem.

Forgione did not return calls for this article, but he told Jonathan Fox of *Education Daily*, "I've been doing this my whole life. It's bad behavior, but it's my money I'm getting back." He is said to have received a six-month consulting contract with the Education Department. (Strange treatment if he were really departing under an ethical cloud.) He appeared last week at oversight hearings of the House Education and Workforce committee. Republicans—like Mike Castle of Delaware and Peter Hoekstra of Michigan—used the occasion to argue that stricter statutory independence be given to the NCES. Congressional Democrats—Harold Ford of Tennessee, Bobby Scott of Virginia, Tim Roemer of Indiana—again proved themselves formidable presidential historians, alluding to an incident in 1992 when President Bush prematurely revealed some statistics. They stressed that the vice president's statistical interest reflects nothing more than his high degree of commitment to education. Republicans are less bothered by this line of thinking than one would imagine. "Bringing attention to education issues is not a bad thing," says Republican committee staffer Vic Klatt. "What bothers us more is that the vice president manipulated the data and then tried to claim credit for it."

But two disturbing aspects of this seemingly minor incident show Gore to be truly Clinton's heir. The first is the elevation of public relations over public service. Gore is flinging around rhetoric about how much he cares about education, but he is unwilling to countenance a bureaucrat who wants to match that rhetoric to reality. The NCES is a key federal education body, and no one has been nominated to head it once Forgione goes. So the "education vice president" has shown himself perfectly willing to leave the program rudderless for months.

Second is the need he feels to cloak brass-knuckles politics with trumped-up, post-facto "moral" justifications. Of course, low-ranking administration officials, if they don't toe the line, will always be prey to high-ranking administration officials—and may pay with their jobs. Of course the White House will try to disguise its Machiavellian motives from the public. But corruption is one thing and delusions of moral grandeur are another. The Forgione case makes us worry about Gore in much the way Travelgate made us worry about the Clintons. It's the sign of a bizarre need on Gore's part to disguise his Machiavellian motives from himself.

Christopher Caldwell is senior writer at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

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Selected Readings on School Reform

Charter Schools

The popularity of charter schools has not waned over time; indeed, each year more states pass enabling legislation. As we reported in $(SR)^2$ in April, even New York, a state whose teachers' and administrators' unions have been notoriously resistant to the idea, recently became the 35th state to enact charter school legislation. (Oklahoma and Oregon then became the 36th and 37th.) With 13 more states to be conquered, many are starting to ask the tough questions about these new public schools of choice. James Traub, writing in *The New York Times Education Life*, has a few of his own: "It's an idea everybody loves to love. But will charter schools be here tomorrow, or are they just another indispensable innovation of the moment?" Traub takes an especially hard look at the feasibility of "autonomy" as a catalyst for education reform. This piece is worth your time, charter-watchers.

Next up is a cautionary tale. Debbie Wilogren and Valerie Strauss, in their *Washington Post* article "Two Charter Schools' Troubles Raise Questions," report on the ad hoc oversight process that led to the probation of two DC charter schools. Monitors who visited these schools detected little evidence of student learning and an aimless educational mission, which led the DC Board of Education hastily to establish a probationary process. This article drives home the importance of the screening process (before the charter is granted) and the accountability system (that allows closing down a school after a charter is granted). Some charter sponsors do this conscientiously, some do not. In the nation's capital, we have examples of both!

Clint Bolick, litigation director for the Institute for Justice, writes in *The Wall Street Journal* about the wrong way to go about shutting down charter schools. His op-ed, "Bill Lann Lee's War on Charter Schools," documents how Lee, "the thrice-nominated, never-confirmed 'acting' chief of the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division," has aimed a volley of school desegregation statutes at charter schools in a "campaign to stop charter schools in their tracks." Lee has targeted charter schools located in primarily minority districts because he fears they would draw in the few white students in the area, further disturbing the racial balances. Bolick points out that these claims are dubious: racial balance is unlikely to be worse than it already is in public schools. Moreover, charter schools might attract white students from private schools.

Students at Houston's KIPP Academy show how well disadvantaged youngsters can be served in charter schools. Gail Russell Chaddock, in *The Christian Science Monitor*, credits this outstanding school with providing "Success for Kids Accustomed to Failure." KIPP offers an intense middle school program that allows students to make up for "lots of lost ground, because most schools lower expectations for students in the seventh and eighth grades." Well done, KIPP.

DDW

New York Times Magazine, April 4, 1999

A School of Your Own

It's an idea everybody loves to love. But will charter schools be here tomorrow, or are they just another indispensable innovation of the moment? **By James Traub**

THE CHARTER SCHOOL of Wilmington sits atop the old district high-school building like Rome on its ruins. The old school was phased out in the mid-90's in favor of four themed mini-schools, the educational innovation of the moment. That moment turned out to be very brief: two of the mini-schools — the Banking and Finance School and an academy based on the progressive theories of Ted Sizer — did not even attract enough students to open. The Charter School of Wilmington absorbed the Math and Science mini-school and opened on the third floor of the building in 1996.

The new school has been an instant success: its population has already grown to 552 from 253, and next year it will begin creeping down into the space vacated by the former high school.

What is true in Wilmington is true generally: the charter school movement is sweeping everything before it. There were, at last count, 1,208 charter schools across the country, with 200 more scheduled for September. Even the most intransigent state legislatures are falling: in December, after several years of stout resistance from teachers' and administrators' unions, New York became the 35th and most recent state to pass a law governing the creation of charter schools. Responding to all this enthusiasm, President Clinton has called for 3,000 new charter schools by the year 2000.

Critics are getting hard to find, while from advocates one increasingly hears breathless tales of dead schools transformed, of inner-city children engaged, of hide-bound school systems rising to the marketplace challenge with a burst of reform.

Of course, one hears a lot of euphoria these days in the world of school reform — about "multiple intelligence" schools and Core Knowledge schools and parochial schools and a dozen other species of schools. Indeed, a recent study from the University of California at Los Angeles, which questions virtually all the claims made by charter advocates, concludes that "policy makers who hope for a broad impact should reconsider some of the underlying assumptions that led them to favor charter school reform in the first place." The archeological metaphor is, after all, double-sided: is there, in fact, something so fundamental about this particular innovation that we should expect charter schools to become a fixed part of the school terrain, or will they subside into the rubble of yesterday's indispensable ideas?

Under laws now being passed, organizations or individuals — often parents and teachers — can petition an officially designated body for a charter to operate a school that is free from some or all of the union and civil-service rules and budgetary restrictions that govern ordinary public schools. The charter functions as a contract in which the prospective school spells out how it plans to operate as well as what it vows to accomplish; the sponsoring agency monitors the school, and chooses whether to renew the charter at the end of a specified period, typically five years.

The premise of the charter school movement is that the difference between good and bad schools lies not in any particular classroom practice, but in the way the school itself is administered; or, alternatively, that without the self-governance made possible by a charter, the desired classroom reform, whatever it is, will never be fully realized.

"If you give children access to a mission-driven atmosphere, a school that has high expectations and a structure free from bureaucracy, it's going to yield better results than had that child been in a traditional school," says Jean Allen, the head of the Center for Educational Reform in Washington and a strong charter advocate.

That theory was first articulated by John E. Chubb and Terry M. Moe in their highly controversial 1990 book, "Politics, Markets and America's Schools." The two scholars argued that public schools were bound to fail because they had to answer to school boards, teachers' unions, state governments and other entities whose interests often collided with those of children; private schools were free to make decisions according to what worked, and so achieved more with the same students. Using data gleaned from a study of 60,000 high-school students, they concluded that the difference between effective and ineffective school organization could amount to more than one full year of academic achievement over the four years of high school.

"If Americans want effective schools," the authors wrote, "it appears they must first create new institutions that, in their effects on the choices of individuals, naturally function to promote rather than inhibit the right kinds of organizations."

Even educators who don't share Mr. Chubb and Mr. Moe's faith in the marketplace might agree with their critique of the bureaucracy. Indeed, the fuel of the charter school movement lies in the overwhelming sense of frustration and helplessness many educators say they feel in the face of "the system."

Moreover, charter schools have had an unusually nonpartisan appeal because they prescribe nothing: both progressives and traditionalists can create schools of their own, leaving agnostics free to believe in the wisdom of letting a hundred flowers bloom. Ideologically, the charter proposal occupies a position midway between "choice" — the idea that children can attend any school in their district — and vouchers, which allow children to attend private or parochial schools with public money. Liberals like choice, free-market conservatives like vouchers — and, as it turns out, both have found they can live with charters.

The first charter laws were passed in Minnesota and California in 1991; since then, the movement has blossomed, with its own think tanks, symposiums, Web sites and committed legislators and governors — as well as, of course, its own pantheon of rugged pioneers.

Yvonne Chan started the Vaughn Learning Center in Los Angeles in 1992, and quickly became a poster child for the charter movement. She had spent a quarter-century in the Los Angeles public school system and had a lifetime's worth of scars to show for it. "I tried school-based management, I tried everything," she says, "but they handcuff your hands with so many policies, so many rules and regulations. If your toilet seat is broken, tough luck; you wait till everybody's get fixed."

Now, she says, she uses her control over the school's $6 million budget to swing advantageous deals for computers, to increase teacher training for literacy, to reduce class size in the bilingual program and to "mainstream" students in special education.

IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO SAY WHAT CHARTER schools look like. The Minnesota New Country School, in the farming town of Henderson, resembles a Kinko's, with children at personalized work stations and teachers moving from child to child, guiding them on long-term projects. There are Afrocentric charter schools and Outward Bound-type charter schools. Colorado has five Core Knowledge charter schools, where children study a specified and rigorous curriculum, but the state also has a school whose mission statement says that it "gives equal weight to intellectual and character development" and "students exercise many choices as they decide which activities, materials and resources they use, under the auspices of their advisers."

With the educational marketplace jammed with competing designs, the charter school has become the blank slate on which absolutely everything can be drawn and tested.

The Charter School of Wilmington differs from a typical high school only in that it is smaller, calmer and possibly more old-fashioned. The school bills itself as an option for students who want to take their studies seriously. It gives out academic letters as well as athletic ones, and holds an annual academic banquet for students who make the honor roll. Students must take 24 courses to graduate, rather than the 19 or 20 normally required in the district, and 10 math and science courses, rather than the usual 6 or 8. All classes are divided into three "homogeneous groupings," the current euphemism for academic tracks.

Progressive doctrine hasn't made much of a dent at the Wilmington charter school. In most classes, students sit in rows and the teacher stands at the front. At the same time, it is not an airless place, and its students seem respectful and attentive. It feels like the ideal parochial school, which is not entirely surprising: the prin-

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cipal, Ronald Russo, used to run the biggest parochial high school in the state, and he brought a number of teachers and administrators with him.

Delaware passed its charter law in 1995, and six of the state's major employers, including Du Pont and Bell Atlantic, joined forces to sponsor a school with high standards. Those two companies kicked in $100,000 apiece, found the site and created a board of directors, who hired Mr. Russo. None of this is atypical; charter schools often form links with local employers, and almost always supplement their budget with outside money. Delaware law allows charter schools to dispense with the teachers' union, which the school did. This has freed Mr. Russo and his colleagues to hire teachers they considered appropriate — and, when necessary, fire them. Since a third of the teachers could be uncertified, as long as they were working toward certification, the school hired a chiropractor with a background in biology to teach biology, anatomy and physiology. And Mr. Russo could spend the $6,600 per student he received from the state and the district as he chose.

The school's teachers and administrators say that autonomy from central control allows them to direct their energies toward their academic mission, just as Mr. Chubb and Mr. Moe would have predicted. When the teachers learned they had to change the science curriculum to satisfy new state graduation requirements, they created a new ninth-grade science course during a three-hour meeting.

"We are the paragon of school-based management," says Charles Biehl, the school's dean of math and science. "We control our own destiny."

SINCE FEW CHARTER SCHOOLS ARE MORE than three years old, it's not yet possible to say whether charter status has any effect on academic performance. But charter proponents argue that the anecdotal evidence so far is positive. Ms. Allen, of the Center for Educational Reform, says she knows of 60 charters nationwide that have either outperformed comparable noncharter schools or produced larger gains than students had before the school converted to charter status. The Wilmington Charter School is one example. Last year, its students had the highest average S.A.T. score of any public school in the state; the year before that, they registered the highest score on the state's writing assessment test. Ms. Allen also points out that charter schools have succeeded according to nonacademic indexes of effectiveness — attendance, student retention, parental involvement, teacher satisfaction.

Nevertheless, many charter schools are limping along, and 30 schools, or 2.5 percent of the total, have closed so far, according to Ms. Allen. Six failed to win a renewal, four closed voluntarily and the other 20 had their charters revoked.

Mary Gifford, the vice president of the Arizona State Board for Charter Schools, which has sponsored about half of that state's 289 such schools, says that most of the eight schools that have been closed in Arizona suffered from poor management. But the underlying problem, she says, was that parents were not satisfied. "The charter schools lost students and had to be creative in operations," Ms. Gifford says. "In some cases, that creativity has led to illegality; in other cases, it just led to a big mess." Two schools are being investigated for shoddy, and possibly fraudulent, bookkeeping.

Even a passionate charter advocate like Joe Nathan, the head of the Center for School Change at the University of Minnesota's Humphrey Institute, concedes that Arizona has been too eager to get large numbers of schools up and running.

In his recent book, "Political Leadership and Educational Failure," Sidney Sarason rebukes charter school euphoria by asking, "Is the creation of charter schools ... exempt from what we know about the creation of settings?" — that is, that complicated new experiments in social policy tend to run into unanticipated problems and fail.

Mr. Sarason, a retired professor of psychology at Yale, is a harsh critic of public schools and a strong proponent of structural reform. But he argues that advocates, and especially political leaders, have been so beguiled by the imagery of autonomy that they haven't asked the hard questions.

"Do we have to be subjected to yet another instance of an educational innovation the implementation of which is a catalogue of errors of omission and commission?" he writes.

Other critics, especially defenders of the public schools, dispute the very premise of charter reform. "It is time to rest the tired rhetoric that all bureaucracy is bad and all autonomy from bureaucracy is good," concludes Amy Stuart Wells, the author of the U.C.L.A. study. Ms. Wells says that charter schools in California are excluding the most disadvantaged parents, are not being held accountable for academic performance, are not using their power over their budget to save money, are not improving academic outcomes, are not having any effect on the public schools — are not, in short, accomplishing a single goal of the charter movement.

The report is easily the harshest assessment yet published. Diane Ravitch, an education historian and a charter proponent, calls it "a hit job," and others in the charter school world take the study, and the major publicity it has garnered, as a sign that the ideological fires are still smoldering. Ms. Wells insisted in an interview that she favors charter schools but thinks they are unfair to the neediest children. She points out that three-quarters of California charter schools require prospective parents to sign a "contract" requiring volunteer work.

"That's great for the school," she says, "but if you look at it from a public-policy level you start to wonder if these schools are creaming off some of the most involved parents." Ms. Wells argues that the very notion of giving choices excludes less-engaged parents, though studies show that one merit of the charter idea, and of school choice in general, is that it increases parental involvement.

Charter schools also attract the same percentage of black and Hispanic students as public schools, according to a report commissioned by the United States Department of Education, though the percentage of students in poverty is slightly lower in charters.

Limiting choice in the name of preserving equity might have an unintended consequence, too. Schools that don't have to respond to dissatisfied parents don't need to change. But Ms. Wells argues that the virtues of the marketplace model have been "hugely exaggerated," and insists that it is collaboration, not competition, that drives school reform.

There is, however, another critique of the charter school idea that has rarely been aired. The premise of the charter movement is that autonomy is the most important variable for school success; or, more modestly, other reforms won't work absent autonomy. But is this really so? The big-city public schools of a half-century ago — which are often taken to represent the high-water mark of educational effectiveness — were even more centralized and bureaucratic than the failed school systems of today. Schools in Western Europe and Asia, whose performance puts America's in the shade, are every bit as hierarchical as our own.

There are also growing examples of academic success in public schools that have radically recast the conventional curriculums. For instance, a recent study found that Core Knowledge schools significantly outperform comparable conventional schools. E.D. Hirsch, the founder of these schools, says he considers charter status irrelevant. "It depends more on the principal," he says. On the other side of the pedagogical divide, Howard Gardner, the author of "Multiple Intelligences" and a leading progressive thinker, takes a similar position. Both agree that what matters is changing classroom practices.

But if you believe that what finally matters is the mode of instruction, why would you choose a content-neutral marketplace innovation to get there?

"If all the public schools were doing what they were doing 70 years ago, with a rich, strong curriculum, and the teachers understood it, you wouldn't see me advocating charter schools," Ms. Ravitch explains. But unlike Ms. Wells, she believes that schools will change only if they are forced to.

"As long as you have a system in which 90 percent of the kids are in the system and there's no interior reason to change, there will be this continual drift toward vacuity and illiteracy and social promotion," she observes. "But once you create these outlying organizations called charters, then the people inside the system will say, 'These people are getting public money; you've got to hold them accountable.' Then you produce a dynamic where even the people inside the system are demanding real standards."

Ms. Ravitch's argument represents a metalevel of school despair: you can change individual schools, but you'll never change the system without a challenge from the outside. This is, in fact, the nub of the marketplace argument. "The test of the charter school reform is not those schools, but what happens in the rest of the system," says John Chubb, who is now a partner in the Edison Project, a for-profit company that runs charter schools in seven states.

Mr. Chubb says that charter schools have already forced school districts around the country to consider the kinds of broad changes they once felt they could neglect. One sign of this, he says, is the increasingly warm reception given to Edison, which, until recently, many school boards and teachers' unions have scorned. Seattle is converting to an autonomy-without-charters, school-based system of management. Meanwhile, Ronald Russo says it's no coincidence that his Wilmington district recently decided to raise graduation requirements to 24 credits.

Still, it's an extremely indirect route to a goal. School systems will be responding to all sorts of messages from charters, and most of them will not be about the virtues of either a core curriculum or individual instruction. They will be about hiring, budgeting, parent-teacher councils and so on.

Moreover, as Mr. Sarason points out, many of these schools will offer object lessons only in the immense difficulty of creating schools from scratch. There may end up being a very large gap between euphoria and test scores. ■

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Washington Post, May 9, 1999

Two Charter Schools' Troubles Raise Questions

By DEBBIE WILGOREN; VALERIE STRAUSS

A monitoring team visiting the Young Technocrats Mathematics and Science Public Charter School in Northeast Washington recently saw strangers roaming the halls and students acting up in the classrooms. At a Northwest church that houses the World Public Charter School, monitors said that many students were out sick and that teachers were doing little but preparing for an assembly.

Those findings led the D.C. Board of Education last month to hastily establish a probationary process for charter schools and to then place Young Technocrats and World on probation. A corrective plan from the schools is due tomorrow, and monitors have scheduled follow-up visits next week.

The difficulties have deeply disturbed some parents, who enrolled their children when the two schools opened in the fall in hopes of finding an escape from the troubled D.C. school system. Questions have been raised about the adequacy of the chartering process and -- since administrators at both schools dispute the monitors reports -- about whether the monitoring is being carried out fairly.

"I've heard some names [of other charter schools], but after being burned . . . I'm leery," said Tammy Smiley, who withdrew her eighth-grade son from Young Technocrats and put him in Paul Junior High School in Northwest. "Is there supposed to be someone minding the shop that is charter schools?"

In the past three years, 19 charter schools serving about 3,650 students have opened in the District. Most of the schools, which are publicly funded but independently operated, appear to be running smoothly, and no others have been placed on probation. But education advocates say the problems at Young Technocrats and World show the need for proper oversight.

School board member Tonya Vidal Kinlow (At Large), who heads the elected board's chartering committee, said the schools were placed on probation because of deficiencies such as high staff turnover, poor record-keeping, missed payrolls, weak academic programs and lax student discipline. They have up to six months to address the board's concerns or risk revocation of their charter.

Probation, Kinlow said, "is a step before revocation that sends a signal to them that says, 'Hey, we are serious about this; we intend to get the results that you promised us, because we have children at stake.' "

The board, one of two panels authorized to establish charter schools, is sensitive to the issue of oversight. The ill-fated Marcus Garvey Public Charter School, which the board approved in 1996, subsequently lost its charter after the principal was convicted of assaulting a newspaper reporter and accused of financial mismanagement.

But officials at Young Technocrats and World have challenged much of the reports of the monitors, who visit all charter schools every quarter. And charter school advocates, while applauding the idea of putting struggling schools on probation, say they have concerns about the way the elected board approved and has monitored some schools.

The elected board, according to some of its critics, continues to give the green light to too many schools, with too little scrutiny, and does not intervene quickly enough when a school is having difficulty. The board, they say, should have pressured Young Technocrats and World to delay their opening in the fall when they had trouble finding space to rent. Instead, those schools and some others welcomed students amid last-minute changes and emergency repairs.

"You can't just blithely give the stamp of approval to anything and then make it accountable," said Jim Ford, a former D.C. Council aide and a longtime school board critic who now helps charters and other schools across the country. "You have to really believe it can meet the bar."

Several pro-chartering groups said they weren't surprised when the schools, especially Young Technocrats, were put on probation. They said they had received frequent complaints from parents about the school, long after other charters had overcome initial start-up troubles.

"I think the vast majority of parents and children, from what I'm aware of, are very pleased" with charter schools, said Shirley Monastra, head of the District-based Public Charter School Resource Center. Any dissatisfied

parents "will not have their children return next year."

Congress authorized the creation of charter schools in the District in 1996, passing one of the most liberal chartering laws in the country, allowing as many as 20 new schools a year.

The elected school board has approved the opening of 11 charter schools, including eight this past fall. The appointed Public Charter School Board has authorized eight more, all of which opened this school year.

The schools, which are not bound by school system bureaucracy, can experiment with curriculum, staffing and programs. Some emphasize rigorous academics, technology, foreign languages or the arts; others target students who have disabilities or have not succeeded in traditional schools.

Nine more schools are expected to open in September, and charter proponents say they could eventually lure a substantial percentage of the 72,000 students who now attend the city's 146-school system.

In scathing reports to the school board, the monitors said Young Technocrats and World had far fewer students than they initially said they would serve. Young Technocrats, a school offering pre-kindergarten through 12th grade at the old Langley Junior High in Northeast, has lost dozens of staff members and teachers, in part because it overspent its budget and has difficulty making payroll. With the exception of the younger grades, the monitors said that academic programs were sketchy and that students were unruly and did not appear to be learning.

Smiley said she withdrew her son because he never had homework. She also complained that some older students were working as security guards and that teachers dressed in suggestive miniskirts.

Young Technocrats Principal Wali Williams said, "Everything that's legitimate, that needs correction, we'll correct." But he denied that students have worked as security guards and disputed much of the school board's monitoring report, including the enrollment figures. Williams attributed payroll problems -- he and his staff have not been paid for nearly two months -- on the need to spend $ 600,000 to make emergency repairs to Langley, which the school system leased to him only a month before school started.

"There was no roof. No electricity. No running water. No functioning bathrooms," he said.

Dorothy Goodman, head of the World school, also took issue with the monitors' report. She said they inaccurately wrote that 26 of her students were present and 33 absent. Actually, she said, 33 were in school the day of the visit and 26 were out because of the flu.

Young Technocrats, which initially said it would serve 630 students, had only 224 in attendence the day the monitors visited, according to their report. Williams said 500-plus students are enrolled.

Goodman complained that monitors misinterpreted her comment that she gives teachers autonomy to mean that the World school, which teaches pre-kindergarten and first grade in several foreign languages, has no formal curriculum. The report also criticized the school as having poor record-keeping, high staff turnover and too few school days.

Goodman, a longtime educator who founded the private Washington International School, said the probation came without warning.

In contrast, the appointed chartering panel has designed a multi-layered intervention process that begins with a written warning and offers help to schools before their charters are threatened. No school has received warnings yet.

Mike Peabody, head of Friends of Urban Choice in Public Schools, said the elected board focuses "on petty stuff" and does not help its charters survive the way the appointed board does.

He also questioned the makeup of the elected board's monitoring teams, particularly the inclusion of Robert Artisst, an unsuccessful candidate for school board who was accused last fall of misrepresenting his academic credentials and is an outspoken critic of charter schools.

Artisst, who, like other monitors, is paid $ 100 a visit, did not return phone calls.

Kinlow defended the board's performance, saying members have been in frequent contact with the schools they charter and have tried without success to work out problems at Young Technocrats and World. She said the panel will hold a workshop Saturday to help charter schools prepare for next school year.

"They've got to have strong, functioning management systems," Kinlow said of the fledgling schools. "If you don't, then you end up with the type of chronic problems we are now seeing in our traditional public schools."

The Wall Street Journal, March 22, 1999

Bill Lann Lee's War on Charter Schools

Rule of Law

By Clint Bolick

As critics, including me, predicted, Bill Lann Lee, the thrice-nominated, never-confirmed "acting" chief of the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division, has relentlessly pursued racial preferences in his 15 months at the helm. But now he has unleashed his forces on a new target: charter schools.

Wielding school desegregation decrees that often are many decades old, Mr. Lee has launched a campaign to stop charter schools in their tracks. His actions put him provocatively at odds both with the goals of desegregation and the Clinton administration's official education policy.

Charter schools are break-the-mold public schools, freed from most bureaucratic restraints, that tend to serve largely minority-student populations—also the supposed beneficiaries of desegregation decrees. President Clinton backs charter schools as an alternative to vouchers for private schools, going so far as to predict that "the only way public schools can survive . . . is if all of our schools are eventually run like . . . charter schools."

Neither law nor policy deters Mr. Lee, who is waging the battle against charter schools with the same ideological zeal with which he fought for forced busing and racial balance in public schools as a lawyer for the NAACP Legal Defense Fund.

The main battleground is Louisiana. In East Baton Rouge, a group called Children's Charter won local approval to open United Charter School last year to offer an alternative for 650 at-risk children. Residents Estella and Winfield Percy welcomed the school for their academically troubled sons. "It's a very structured environment," explained Mrs. Percy, "and it's something our kids need."

But the Civil Rights Division went to court to halt United Charter School from opening. Longstanding desegregation orders require all public schools to be within 15 percentage points of the district's 65% black student population and United Charter School agreed to those racial parameters. But some of the district's other public schools are more than 95% black, and Justice Department officials apparently fear that the charter school will siphon some of the few white students—a dubious proposition given that the new school will be located in a black neighborhood.

But no one knows the division's reasoning for sure, because it refuses to explain itself. One frustrated member of the charter school committee took a photo of a blackboard after a meeting with Justice Department officials in order to finally record something in writing. The division opposed the school's motion to intervene in the desegregation case, and has urged the trial court to postpone consideration until it would be too late for the school to open next fall.

The division's actions to prevent a company called SABIS International from opening a charter school in St. Helena Parish are even more mystifying. The school district is 91% black and has only one elementary school, one junior high, and one high school, making it definitionally impossible to racially balance. Moreover, the charter school agreed that more than 90% of its students would be academically at risk.

Again Mr. Lee's Civil Rights Division objected, apparently believing that the charter school would draw white students who attend private schools in the suburbs. Of course, attracting white students to the overwhelmingly black school district would aid, not inhibit, desegregation. Even if the goals of desegregation are furthered, Mr. Lee apparently is inherently suspicious of any measure that takes power out of the hands of the courts and puts it into the hands of parents.

The division also supported an effort to shut down the New Vision Charter School in Monroe, but federal Judge F.A. Little Jr. refused to go along. Statewide, the division has demanded racial statistics as a precondition for approving any charter schools. But how can a school that doesn't yet exist provide such data? As Gov. Mike Foster has pointed out, exact demographics are impossible until students enroll and staff are hired. Without approval, that process cannot commence, thereby creating precisely the Catch-22 the Civil Rights Division clearly intends.

Bill Lann Lee

"There are a lot of desegregation orders in Louisiana, and the charter law is at risk," remarks Children's Charter board member Rolfe McCollister. "If the final say belongs to a guy from Washington, D.C., we're in trouble."

And not just in Louisiana. These early skirmishes have nationwide ramifications: more than 500 school districts remain subject to court desegregation orders; many of them in large cities and heavily minority school districts that desperately need educational opportunities.

Another battleground is South Carolina, where the Civil Rights Division put a stop last November to a school district's efforts to convert certain schools to charter schools. The division ordered the school district to maintain existing schools and attendance zones, period. The charter schools' impact on racial balance and educational opportunities wasn't even considered.

Meanwhile, Mr. Lee's opposite number in the Education Department's Office for Civil Rights, Norma Cantu, has been using the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act to challenge charter schools. Between Mr. Lee and Ms. Cantu, the concept of charter schools, predicated upon freedom from stifling state and local controls, could perish beneath the federal regulatory hammer. Ironically, such efforts to stifle charter schools could drive more education reformers to embrace vouchers for private schools.

Mr. Clinton has just submitted Bill Lann Lee's nomination to the Senate Judiciary Committee for a third time. He still must persuade Senate Republicans why they should support a civil rights law-enforcement official who refuses to abide by the Supreme Court's precedents on racial preferences. Now the president also must convince pro-charter school Democrats to support an official who is wielding the nation's civil rights arsenal to wreak havoc upon this vital public school reform.

Meanwhile, the East Baton Rouge school system toils under its 43rd year of federal judicial control. Some of the original plaintiff schoolchildren now are 60 years old. How sad that their grandchildren still are denied educational opportunities—and how perverse that the deprivation is visited upon them by the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division.

Mr. Bolick is litigation director of the Institute for Justice in Washington D.C., and author of "Transformation: The Promise and Politics of Empowerment" (1998, ICS Press).

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The Christian Science Monitor, April 13, 1999

Success for kids accustomed to failure

BY **Gail Russell Chaddock,**

You can hear the pace of the learning going on at the KIPP Academy, or the Knowledge is Power Program, long before you see it.

Thump. Thump. CLAP!
Thump. Thump. CLAP!
You gotta read baby read!
You gotta read baby read!
The more you read,
The more you know.
Knowledge is power,
Power is money,
And I want it.

There is nothing subtle about the rap-rhythm chants that pop up at about any point in a KIPP school day. And nothing trivial about the big achievement gains that this public charter school is producing with at-risk Hispanic and black children in Houston.

Only about one-third of kids in the Class of 2004 could pass fourth-grade state tests in reading and math when they enrolled.

After a year, 93 percent were passing math and 92 percent passed reading, despite the fact that many had parents who don't speak English. By sixth grade, pass rates were at or near 100 percent. This year's graduating class started eighth grade solving college-level math problems, according to a national survey.

The style at KIPP is anything but traditional. It's fast-paced, funny, and edgy. But they've based their success on attention to old-fashioned basics: reading, writing, and reasoning -and extensive time for instruction.

"We got together a lot of people not used to failure and plopped them down in places where people were not used to success," says director Michael Feinberg.

He and co-founder David Levin came to Texas as two-year volunteers for Teach for America, a national program that recruits top college graduates to teach in poor schools.

What prompted them to stay on and start a school in 1995 was the experience of watching kids they had taught 'head off to middle school with a head of steam,' then lose their edge, he says.

"Some came back and asked me to give them homework, because 'they won't let us take books home.' I saw the light in their eyes fade. They started doing drugs, getting pregnant; then the light went out," he says.

KIPP started out as a fifth-grade program - with 50 kids in a room - at the Houston Independent School District. The next year, the program expanded into HISD office kitchenettes and onto the stage. They moved five times in four years, and wound up in a cluster of trailers down the road from a Houston highway. KIPP is now a state charter school for fifth- to eighth-graders that operates independently of the district.

KIPP offers kids a high-level curriculum with instruction that is often delivered with as many laughs as a late-night TV monologue. Questions fired off to a fifth-grade class: "What's the capital of Utah?" "What's a salt lake?" "What's evaporation?" "Can you count by sevens?" (Yes!) "Do it!" (7, 14, 21, 28, 35...) Seventh-graders study algebra and read high-school novels. The biggest smiles come when the class gets to shout in unison: "Boring!"

But the heart of the program is a commitment to more time for learning. Students attend classes from 7:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays, four hours on Saturdays, and a month every summer. That's about 67

percent more time in class than in a typical Houston public school.

"We're all running a race. They're behind. You need to run faster to catch up. And we need to break a cycle of despair and failure," Feinberg explains. "Middle school is where poor kids can make up a lot of lost ground, because most schools lower expectations for students in the seventh and eighth grades. This is where we can catch up to the top public and private schools."

With the extra time, KIPP doesn't need to commit to any one reading method. Fifth-graders who come in with a weak grasp of English learn phonics and also read lots of literature. Forty-five minutes a day is set aside for reading novels. In that period, there are no tests, drills, or grades; just reading and talking about books with teachers who clearly love them.

"We're looking for people who are very knowledgeable, who don't have to rely on the teacher's edition. They need to connect with kids, to translate information into a way kids will get. And they need to make an extra effort," says Mr. Feinberg.

At KIPP, that extra effort means regular home visits and carrying a cell phone - standard issue for teachers here. Students are required to phone teachers at home if they have any problems with their homework. No excuses.

"When teachers get together for a night out in a restaurant, the cell phones never stop ringing," quips Laurie Bieber, director of development at KIPP. "What we do, anyone can do. It's the time and the dedicated staff that make a difference."

Most teachers have liberal-arts degrees and little formal training in education methods. More than a third are Teach for America veterans. On paper, KIPP teachers look undercredentialed and teaching out of field, but you'd never know it to watch them.

A clear culture is at work that everyone learns on site. Feinberg teaches a class on thinking skills that includes KIPP raps along with problem-solving, SAT analogies, and novels. This first-year course "ties together the entire curriculum," he says.

Teachers are encouraged to visit master teachers in other states as well as to pursue professional development. Feinberg credits Houston teacher and mentor Harriet Ball with the distinctive approach at KIPP (see story, below).

She also developed the approach to discipline and classroom management used at KIPP. Instead of sending kids out of class or on suspension, they're sent "to the porch." Kids sent there can't talk to classmates during the day. They're also required to write a letter to each classmate to explain how they are going to improve.

One student is close to porch duty. Feinberg takes her aside. "Get back on the ball. You're digging a deeper hole for yourself." (She didn't complete an assignment and misbehaved on the bus.) "Those five minutes the teacher had to talk to you about not doing your homework is taking time from class."

Parents are part of the regime. Students, teachers, and parents sign a "commitment to excellence." Parents commit to trying to read with kids at night, to checking homework, and to letting kids call teachers about work. The form concludes: "We, not the school, are responsible for the behavior and actions of our child. Failure to adhere to these commitments can cause my child to lose various KIPP privileges, spend time on the 'porch,' and can lead to my child returning to his/her home school."

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Selected Readings on School Reform

School Choice

Matthew Miller offers one of the most important articles on school choice written in a long while. Entitled "A Bold Experiment to Fix City Schools" and published in *The Atlantic Monthly*, it asks, "Where is the 'voucher left'?" It asserts a "long but unappreciated pedigree" of support for choice among progressive reformers. Miller proposes a bold experiment: pick three or four big cities, boost education spending 20%, and provide vouchers to all low-income students. He gets Milton Friedman, Lamar Alexander, and Kweisi Mfume, among others, to sign on. (He fails in his attempt to recruit union bosses Bob Chase and Sandy Feldman.) Miller's a great salesman; we'll buy what he's offering: a real chance for millions of underserved kids.

When the Children's Scholarship Fund (CSF), the private scholarship organization underwritten by Ted Forstmann and John Walton, held lotteries around the country for eligible students, families signed up in droves. Mike Bowler, of the *Baltimore Sun*, reports that an astounding 44% of eligible Baltimore families applied for scholarships to go to private schools. As Bowler notes, "Middle-class parents always have had available school alternatives. Now low-income parents have them, too. School choice has landed in Baltimore." CSF has also landed in 42 other cities—upwards of one million applications were received for the 40,000 scholarships available this round. And, as a *USA Today* editorial notes, "Eager Response to Offer of Private Scholarships Raises Fears, Hopes."

In a *Washington Post* essay, Stanford's Terry Moe looks at the "Public Revolution Private Money Might Bring" and predicts that grass-roots demand will compel more Democrats and civil rights groups to support vouchers. He also predicts that demand will move beyond the inner–city. Evidence of desire for different schools is already visible in some suburbs. Joseph Berger, in *The New York Times*, reports on the phenomenon of families paying to send their kids to public schools outside their district. Then Charles Wheelen, in his *Times* editorial "Turning the Tables on School Choice," makes the case for why Democrats should support school choice.

Critics of private and home schooling often claim that the private and home schooled families will be self-absorbed recluses or hermits, disengaged from civil society and civic life. Taking these arguments on are Christian Smith and David Sikkink, who asked and answered "Is Private Schooling Privatizing?" in their recent *First Things* article. Looking at evidence from the 1996 National Household Education Survey, Smith and Sikkink conclude that these families are indeed more likely to participate in such activities as library groups, service projects, and community sports teams.

While choice is growing in the U.S., across our northern border, the Province of Quebec is moving away from a long-standing tradition of allowing families to choose which religious schools their children attend. Steven Pearlstein, writing in *The Washington Post*, describes the mounting challenge to "confessional education" and a recent commission's recommendation that all students take a course on world religions.

Moving back across the Great Lakes to Cleveland, we serve up a timely piece about the Ohio Supreme Court's decision regarding that city's voucher program. Although the program was struck down on procedural grounds, "Ohio Court Upholds Constitutionality of School Voucher Program" heralds a headline in *The Washington Post*.

Voucher programs aren't alone in having enemies. Magnet schools established to offer academically rigorous programs that would attract students across the racial divide are also being challenged. Heather Mac Donald, in her *City Journal* article "How Gotham's Elite High Schools Escaped the Leveller's Ax," credits the education establishment's general antipathy towards elite schools as the main reason for wanting to scrap these high-powered super schools (including such famous institutions as the Bronx High School of Science). In England, academically selective grammar schools are also to be abolished. *The Economist* article "Class Peace" details the Blair government's bill to replace selective programs and school choice with muddled mini-programs.

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The Atlantic Monthly, July 1999

A Bold Experiment to Fix City Schools

A proposal for school vouchers on which Milton Friedman, Lamar Alexander, and Kweisi Mfume, the president of the NAACP, all agree

by Matthew Miller

WHEN Maria Neri's daughter Tina finished eighth grade, two years ago, her scholarship at a Catholic elementary school in south-central Los Angeles ended. The parochial high school in which Neri (not her real name) hoped to enroll Tina charges $3,500 a year—a third less than the $5,400 Los Angeles would spend to educate Tina in public school. Neri, thirty-three, earns $600 a month as a part-time teacher's aide; she's looking for a second, and perhaps a third, job. Her husband, from whom she is separated, earns $1,200 a month as a laborer in a glass factory. He pays his wife's monthly rent of $340, but offers no support beyond that. After paying for food, a phone, gas, and other expenses, Neri had no money left to put toward private school for Tina. Yet she was afraid to send Tina to the neighborhood public school, where the walls were covered with graffiti, and "*cholos*," or gang members, had been involved in shootings that brought police helicopters to the campus. So Neri used her sister's address to enroll Tina at another public school, which, though twenty minutes away, at least seemed safer. But it is far from ideal. Classrooms each have forty to forty-five children belonging to several different grades. Tina, sixteen, says the teachers often have the students watch movies. Her math teacher was so confused about who Tina was that he gave her an F for not completing many assignments—a grade he changed, with embarrassment and an apology, after Neri confronted him with Tina's completed workbook. "I can see the difference," Neri says. "She's going down." Tina says she would go back to Catholic school if they could afford it. "I talk to my daughter," Neri explains, "and say, 'I'm sorry.'"

Neri's desire to send Tina to a better school is at the heart of one of the nation's most important and most demagogic debates. Through vouchers, often touted as an answer to Neri's problem, the government would give parents some or all of the money it now spends educating their children to use at a school of their choice. Depending on whom you listen to, vouchers are either a lifeline or a death knell. "It is quite simply an issue of survival for our nation's poorest students," says Dan Coats, a Republican and a former senator from Indiana. But Kweisi Mfume, the president of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, calls vouchers a "terrible threat," and Sandra Feldman, the president of the American Federation of Teachers, says they mean "a radical abandonment of public schools and public education."

These are heated claims, especially given the relatively small number of students who are involved in voucher programs today. Just over 52 million students attend grades K through 12 in the

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United States. Only two cities offer publicly funded vouchers: in Milwaukee (whose breakthrough program was begun in 1990) roughly 6,000 of 107,000 students get vouchers; in Cleveland about 4,000 of 77,000 do. In May, Florida approved a plan under which students at the poorest-performing schools would get vouchers. Four schools are expected to be eligible this year, and 12,000 of the state's 2.3 million K–12 kids are expected to use vouchers over the next four years. Privately funded voucher programs in thirty-one cities served roughly 12,000 children last year; ten new such programs came into being for the 1998–1999 school year. Two wealthy investors, Ted Forstmann and John Walton, recently announced a plan to fund (along with other donors) $170 million in vouchers, which will reach 40,000 new students over the next four years.

Add these numbers up and you get 74,000 children—about 0.1 percent of students. Add 200,000 for those students in the 1,200 charter schools around the country (which also give parents a choice), and the proportion comes to only 0.5 percent of schoolchildren. In other words, the school-choice debate is

Where is the "voucher left"? Vouchers have a long but unappreciated pedigree among progressive reformers.

taking place utterly at the margins. At this rate, for all the fuss, it's hard to imagine that any impact could be made on the skills and life chances of students stuck in our worst public schools in time to prevent what the Reverend Floyd Flake, a voucher advocate and a former Democratic congressman from New York, calls "educational genocide."

This tragedy is most pronounced in big cities, whose public schools together serve six million children. Despite heroic local efforts and pockets of success, depressing evidence mounts of an achievement gap between students in cities and those in suburbs, where, school-watchers say, most schools are doing fine, largely because they're safer, better funded, and less prone to the social ills that plague cities. Of Detroit's eleventh-graders 8.5 percent were deemed "proficient" in science on Michigan's 1997 statewide exam. Fourth-graders in Hartford were a tenth as likely as Connecticut students overall to show proficiency on the state's three achievement tests in 1996. Only two percent of Cleveland's minority tenth-graders have taken algebra. "The numbers tell a sad and alarming story," a special report in *Education Week* concluded last January. "Most 4th graders who live in U.S. cities can't read and understand a simple children's book, and most 8th graders can't use arithmetic to solve a practical problem." As polls prove, increasing numbers of urban parents like Maria Neri want a way out. It seems immoral to argue that they must wait for the day when urban public schools are somehow "fixed." It's even harder to argue that bigger voucher programs could make things worse.

Yet a political standoff has kept vouchers unavailable to nearly 99 percent of urban schoolchildren. Bill Clinton and most leading Democrats oppose them, saying we should fix existing public schools, not drain money from the system. Teachers' unions, the staunchest foes of vouchers, are among the party's biggest donors, and sent more delegates to the 1996 Democratic National Convention than did the state of California. Republicans endorse vouchers as a market-based way to shake up calcified bureaucracies, but they generally push plans that affect only a few students. The distrust that has led to today's gridlock is profound. Republicans view Democrats as union pawns defending a failed status quo; Democrats think Republicans want to use urban woes as justification for scrapping public education and the taxes that fund it.

MISSING entirely from the debate is the progressive pro-voucher perspective. To listen to the unions and the NAACP, one would think that vouchers were the evil brainchild of the economist Milton Friedman and his conservative devotees, lately joined by a handful of desperate but misguided urban blacks. In fact vouchers have a long but unappreciated intellectual pedigree among reformers who have sought to help poor children and to equalize funding in rich and poor districts. This "voucher left" has always had less cash and political power than its conservative counterpart or its union foes. It has been ignored by the press and trounced in internecine wars. But if urban children are to have any hope, the voucher left's best days must lie ahead.

Finding a productive compromise means recalling the role of progressives in the history of the voucher movement and exposing the political charades that poison debate. It means finding a way for unorthodox new leaders to build a coalition—of liberals for whom the moral urgency of helping city children trumps ancient union ties, and of conservatives who reject a laissez-faire approach to life's unfairness. The goal of such a coalition should be a "grand bargain" for urban schools: a major multi-year test of vouchers that touches not 5,000 but 500,000 children, and eventually five million—and *increases* school spending in the process. The conventional wisdom says that today's whittled-down pilot programs are all that is politically achievable. The paradox is that only through bigger thinking about how vouchers might help can a durable coalition emerge.

IN 1962 John E. "Jack" Coons, an idealistic thirty-two-year-old law professor at Northwestern University, was asked by the U.S. Civil Rights Commission to study whether Chicago schools were complying with desegregation orders. Coons soon found that what really interested him was a different question: Why were suburban schools so much better than those downtown? Over the next few years Coons, eventually joined by two law students, Stephen Sugarman and William Clune, found one answer in what would become a source of enduring outrage: America's property-tax-based system of public-school finance created dramatic disparities in the resources available to educate children.

This financial aspect of education's vaunted tradition of "local control" is rarely the subject of national controversy. In part that is because it gives the nation's most powerful citizens both lower taxes *and* better schools. Imagine two towns, Slumville and Suburbia. Slumville has

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$100,000 in taxable property per pupil; Suburbia has $300,000. If Slumville votes to tax its property at four percent, it raises $4,000 per pupil. But Suburbia can tax itself at two percent and raise $6,000 per pupil. Suburbia's tax rate is half as high, but its public schools enjoy 50 percent more resources per student.

In the 1960s affluent districts routinely spent twice what nearby poorer ones did, and sometimes four or five times as much. To Coons and his colleagues, such inequity in a public service was indefensible. Beginning with *Private Wealth and Public Education*, a book that he, Sugarman, and Clune published in 1970, Coons has denounced the system eloquently. It's worth sampling his arguments, because the left's case for choice is usually drowned out by the right's cheerleading for markets, or by urban blacks' cry for help. In a 1992 essay, "School Choice as Simple Justice," Coons wrote,

> This socialism for the rich we blithely call "public," though no other public service entails such financial exclusivity. Whether the library, the swimming pool, the highway or the hospital—if it is "public," it is accessible. But admission to the government school comes only with the price of the house. If the school is in Beverly Hills or Scarsdale, the poor need not apply.

Coons's point was simple: the quality of public education should not depend on local wealth—unless it is the wealth of a state as a whole. "Everyone ought to be put in a roughly equivalent position with regard to what the state will do," Coons, now an emeritus law professor at Berkeley, says.

Coons and Sugarman made a successful case for the unconstitutionality of the school-finance system in California's famous *Serrano* case in 1971, beginning a national movement to litigate for school equity. Although it was little noticed then, they cited vouchers as a potential remedy. The idea was to give courts a way to instruct legislatures to fix things without having to mess with local control. Asking legislatures to centralize school funding at the state level was a political nonstarter. But through various formulas, Coons and Sugarman argued, the state could give families in poorer districts enough cash in the form of vouchers to bring education spending in those districts up to that of better-off districts. And what could be more "local," they reasoned, than giving families direct control over the cash to use at schools as they chose?

COONS and Sugarman, focusing on school equity, thus arrived at a policy that Milton Friedman had been urging through a principled commitment to liberty and to its embodiment, the market. Friedman's 1955 essay "The Role of Government in Education" is viewed as the fountainhead of the voucher movement. In an ideal world, the future Nobel laureate reasoned, the government might have no role in schooling at all; yet a minimum required level of education and its financing by the state could be justified.

> A stable and democratic society is impossible without widespread acceptance of some common set of values and without a minimum degree of literacy and knowledge on the part of most citizens . . . the gain from the education of a child accrues not only to the child or to his parents but to other members of the society. . . . Yet it is not feasible to identify the particular individuals (or families) benefitted or the money value of the benefit and so to charge for the services rendered.

However, Friedman said, if this "neighborhood effect" meant that the government was warranted in paying for K–12 education, another question remained: Should the government run the schools as well? Friedman's view was that schools could be just as "public" if the government financed but didn't administer them. That notion remains virtually unintelligible to leaders in public education, perhaps because it is so threatening.

Friedman's analogy (adopted by every voucher proponent since) was to the G.I. Bill, which gave veterans a maximum sum per year to spend at the institution of their choice, provided that it met certain minimum standards. Likewise, for elementary and secondary schooling Friedman envisioned a universal voucher scheme that would give parents a fixed sum per child, redeemable at an "approved" school of their choice. Such a school might be nonprofit or for profit, religious or secular. Parents could add to the sum if they wished. The role of government would be limited to assuring that "approved" schools included some common content in their programs, "much as it now inspects restaurants to assure that they maintain minimum sanitary standards." In Friedman's view, market-style competition for students would spur the development of schools that were better tailored to families' needs and cost less than those run by notoriously inefficient public bureaucracies.

Friedman's and Coons's different angles of vision represent the ancient tug between liberty and equality within the pro-voucher camp—a debate the two have waged since Friedman was an occasional guest on Coons's Chicago radio show, *Problems of the City*, in the 1960s. Friedman today isn't bothered by issues of school-finance equity. "What's your view of inequity in clothing and food?" he snapped when asked recently, saying that such concerns reflect Coons's "socialistic approach." And even if public schools were making every child an Einstein, Friedman says, he would still want vouchers. "Private enterprise as opposed to collectivism," he says, "would always be better."

Coons is less ideological. In his view, choice would improve the public schools, which he believes would always be chosen by the majority, even with a full-blown voucher system. The prospect of losing students (and thus funding) would force improvements faster than today's seemingly endless rounds of ineffectual education fads. If poor children got a decent education under the current system, he adds, he probably wouldn't have devoted his life to these issues.

The fate of disadvantaged children under a voucher regime is where the Coons-Friedman clash is sharpest. Coons would be glad to offer vouchers to all low-income students and to no one else if such a step were necessary for consensus. He fears that under a universal voucher system they could get left behind, as schools competed to recruit better-off, smarter, healthier (nondisabled) students. The incentives are plain: such children would be easier to teach, and schools could charge wealthy families far more than the voucher amount to maximize profit. Coons and the voucher left therefore insist that any universal scheme should include protections for low-income and disabled children. Examples would be increasing the voucher amount for those children to make them more attractive to schools, and letting schools redeem their vouchers only if, say, 15

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percent of new places were reserved for such children, for whom the voucher would cover tuition. To Friedman, these are unacceptable intrusions on schools' freedom to operate as they like, turning vouchers into "a welfare program, not an education program."

WITHOUT a link to unions—which, despite the waning of their influence, remain one of the few sources of progressive ideas in American public life—liberal pro-voucher champions have had little political impact. The muting of their voice, combined with the ease of legislating pilot programs, explains why few urban children have a choice today. What's more, deceptive arguments by both teachers' unions and conservative activists keep the broader public confused.

A "grand bargain": combine a bigger road test for vouchers with increased per-pupil spending.

Teachers' unions (and voucher foes generally) rely on five dubious arguments.

There's no evidence that vouchers work. The trials have been so isolated, unions say, that their results are unproved. That's a nervy case to make when it is union opposition that has kept the trials small. Pro- and anti-voucher forces have funded research in Milwaukee and Cleveland that purports to show why Johnny is doing demonstrably better or worse under vouchers. It is impossible to make sense of these dueling studies, whose sample sizes are so small that results seem to turn on whether, say, three children in Cleveland handed in their homework on time. Wealthy conservatives are now offering vouchers to all 14,000 at-risk children in a poor San Antonio district in part so as to compile a broader database from which to judge the impact of voucher systems. (In the first semester of the program 566 children taking vouchers left district schools.) For now the "no evidence" argument says more about union chutzpah than about voucher performance.

Vouchers drain money from public schools. Sandra Feldman, of the American Federation of Teachers, says that the $10 million Cleveland uses to give vouchers to 4,000 children would be better spent on measures that would benefit *every* child, such as shrinking class sizes and launching proven reading programs. But this is disingenuous. Cleveland provided the $10 million in addition to more than $600 million in existing school spending in order to mollify unions, which insisted that vouchers not "come out of the hide" of public schools. It's unfair for unions to turn around and complain that the extra cash they insisted on should have gone elsewhere. The truth is that public schools are free to fund such measures now by shifting priorities within their budgets. And when broader voucher plans let the amount that public schools receive per student follow students who leave the system, the public-school coffers are not drained—schools receive the resources their enrollment merits.

Vouchers are unconstitutional. Some critics say that voucher use at religious schools violates the Constitution's ban on "establishment of religion," but the better view of the Supreme Court's confusing jurisprudence here suggests that's wrong. After all, no one thinks that federal student loans are unconstitutional when they are used by students to attend Notre Dame. Last June, Wisconsin's highest court upheld Milwaukee's plan, because the voucher goes to parents to use where they like, not to any particular type of school. In union hands, moreover, this legal complaint seems suspiciously tactical. It can't be that we are constitutionally obligated to imprison urban children in failing schools.

The capacity isn't there. Public schools serve 46 million K–12 children, private schools six million. Since private schools can't accommodate more than a fraction of today's students, opponents say, vouchers can't be a meaningful part of school reform. "Where are these schools going to come from?" Sandra Feldman repeatedly asked during an interview with me.

The first response to this argument is to ask, Then what's the problem? If as a practical matter unions feel that most children with vouchers will remain where they are, it's hard to see what the harm is in trying them. A second response is that even relatively few defections from public schools may spur efforts to improve them. Districts with innovative charter schools have reported such a reaction.

The larger answer, however, is that broader voucher schemes would prompt many institutions and entrepreneurs to add schools and spaces to the "market." This would happen not overnight but over a number of years. The initial spaces would be likely to come from Catholic schools, which account for half the private-school slots in the country. Jerome Porath, the schools chief for the Los Angeles archdiocese, says that if every student got a voucher worth an amount close to the current per-pupil expenditure in California, over several years enough facilities could be built or rented "to accommodate everybody who wanted to come." "We'll get out our spreadsheets and figure it out," he says. Milton Friedman adds, "You can't think of it in terms of the existing stock of schools. There will be a flood of new schools started."

Profit is bad. Voucher foes act as if there were something venal about the profit motive when applied to schools. But public education is already big business. The $320 billion spent last year on K–12 schooling is lusted after by textbook publishers, test designers, building contractors, food and janitorial services, and software companies, to name only a few examples. This largesse inevitably brings scandals—for example, the California flap in 1996 over whether campaign contributions influenced a big textbook purchase. Like health care, defense, and other major public services, schools will always be partly about business; vouchers would simply change who controls the flow of cash. There's no reason to think that the abuses under a voucher system would be worse than abuses today.

Voucher foes make other unpersuasive claims. They say that vouchers will cream off the most-talented children and the most-active parents—a worry that seems acute primarily because today's voucher plans remain tiny. They say that private schools will unfairly be able to avoid troublemaking kids by not admitting them—ignoring the fact that public

districts themselves often send such kids to special schools of "last resort." They say the oversight that will follow public money will make private schools resemble public bureaucracies—ignoring the greater flexibility that most analysts say such schools will retain in hiring and firing, resource allocation, and curriculum design. Finally, they argue that it is crazy to subsidize more-affluent parents who already pay for private school—a seemingly powerful charge until one recalls that such families are now paying twice for schools, and that vouchers offered only to poor families would avoid the problem entirely.

For their part, conservative voucher fans peddle one big misconception: vouchers can save lots of money because per-pupil spending in private schools is typically less than half that in public schools today. It is true that religious schools have fewer administrators and lower-paid teachers, and invest less in such amenities as theaters, labs, and gymnasiums. But private schools don't have to take costly disabled and "special education" children; and often public schools must offer extras such as English as a Second Language, breakfast and lunch programs, and transportation. When such differences are taken into account, and hidden subsidies for church space and staff in religious schools are counted, the gap shrinks. Coons says that a voucher's value needs to be no lower than 85 percent of total per-pupil spending in order to stimulate capital investment in new schools. Set it too low, and the result will be simply to fill the handful of empty Catholic-school seats.

The right's claim that vouchers will deliver big savings also ignores the case for spending more in many big cities, where dilapidated buildings may collectively require as much as $50 billion in repairs. Some public school bureaucracies—Washington, D.C., and St. Louis come to mind—seem so hopeless that it would be senseless to pour new money in until management has improved. But despite run-down buildings and higher proportions of special-needs students, cities such as Philadelphia and Baltimore spend substantially less per pupil than do their states overall.

DISINGENUOUS rhetoric, visceral distrust, maximal posturing, minimal progress. Political debates escape this kind of dead end when grassroots pressure makes the status quo untenable, or when leaders emerge with fresh ways of framing the issues. It's possible that urban schools will fall so far that the poor revolt; or crime, bred by ignorance, might worsen in ways that force society to act. There's a better path to hope for, however, if new leaders can teach us to think differently about today's predicament.

Sounds of rethinking and compromise are in the air. Arthur Levine, the president of Columbia University's Teachers College, is a lifelong liberal and a voucher foe. Yet, frustrated by the seemingly hopeless troubles of inner cities, Levine called last June for a "rescue operation" that would give vouchers to two to three million poor children at the worst urban public schools. "For me," Levine says, "it's the equivalent of Schindler's list." Lisa Graham Keegan, Arizona's superintendent of public instruction and a rising Republican star, calls the property-tax base for school fi-

nance "pernicious" and "wholly unfair." She wants a system of "student-centered funding," in which revenues from a source other than property taxes would be distributed by the state on an equal per-pupil basis through vouchers.

If leading liberals are willing to question the public school monopoly, and prominent conservatives hear the call of justice, the voucher debate has a chance to move forward. The sensible first step would be a much bigger road test. Here's the idea I have put to various players in the debate: Suppose everyone came together and said, Let's take three or four big cities where we agree the public schools are failing. (Leave out dens of mismanagement like Newark and Washington, where spending is high but ineffective.) In these cities we'll raise per-pupil spending by 20 percent, giving urban schools the resources the left says they need, and thus going far to achieve the Coons vision of funding equity. But we'll implement this increase by way of a universal voucher system that finally gives *every* child a choice. So, for example, in a city that now spends $5,000 per pupil, every child would get a $6,000 voucher.

Such a proposal, serving half a million children, would cost $660 million a year. If the voucher system were then extended to all six million big-city children (a logical step if results of the trial were promising), the price tag would be $8 billion a year, or 0.4 percent of federal spending. (For purposes of discussion, I left aside the question of who outside the district would fund the 20 percent increase, though the surplus-rich federal government comes readily to mind.) The responses to this idea suggest how quickly the scale of today's debate could change—and who is responsible if it doesn't.

Jack Coons, the "egalitarian," said it sounds great. Clint Bolick, a conservative lawyer who is active in the voucher movement, also thought it could work—though, he said, the spending increase would mean that "some of my fellow conservatives would have apoplexy." Polly Williams, who led the drive to enact vouchers in Milwaukee, was anxious about extending them to students who aren't poor, so we agreed to give them only to children eligible for the federal school-lunch program. This would still get vouchers to 78,000 children in Milwaukee instead of the current 6,000, and to four million city children nationwide. We would move pretty far toward universal coverage this way, since, sadly, two out of three city children qualify for school-lunch assistance.

What about the NAACP? To date the organization has welcomed philanthropic efforts, but when public funds are at issue, it stands by the unions. Julian Bond, the chairman of the NAACP, recently called vouchers "pork for private schools." Yet when I asked Kweisi Mfume, the NAACP president, about this proposal, he didn't hesitate. "I don't have a problem with that at all," he said. Mfume says that NAACP opposition has been not ideological but based on three concerns: the association doesn't want programs that leave nearly every child out; it wants accountability to the public on student performance; and it wants an honest approach to higher costs—such as those for transportation—that must be paid to make the system work for poor children. The pilot programs in Milwaukee and Cleveland fail especially on grounds one and three; the bargain I sketched addresses them. Mfume said he was open to the proposal as long as the NAACP's concerns were met, even if that meant taking a stance different from the unions'.

"It's a bad idea," Milton Friedman said at first, arguing that any increase in spending would "fuel the racketeers in the education business." Friedman's point is that raising spending could create further opportunities for profit-hungry operators to take the vouchers and run schools much more efficiently—not to their benefit. Owing to systematic federal overpayments, Medicare HMOs face just such scams in many places today.

But outliers like Washington, D.C., aside, it's not clear that urban schools are overspending. Given that, isn't it worth running a little risk to get a substantial voucher test under way? It seemed that Friedman wouldn't sign on, but toward the end of our discussion he relented. "I'll tell you what I would go for," he said. Friedman has always believed that so many families would flee public schools if given a voucher worth even half what is now spent per pupil that resources for

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each child remaining in the system would rise. (If ten public school children have $5,000 spent on each of them, and three leave taking $2,500 each, spending on the seven remaining would rise about 20 percent, to just under $6,100.) So he would approve of a 20 percent increase in per-pupil spending for those who remained, as long as the voucher was worth only half that. Since Friedman thinks that this 20 percent increase will come over time anyway, he's not compromising his ideals. His principled accommodation is to put his money where his beliefs are and increase spending up front as part of the deal.

But look where we are. Baltimore spends $6,400 per pupil today—versus $6,800 spent by Maryland overall. According to Mfume's reasoning, the NAACP would accept a citywide voucher at roughly $7,600. Friedman could live with $7,600 for current public school pupils but would want a voucher for departing students at $3,800. Surely there's a deal to be made here—and a chance, therefore, to help millions of children while meaningfully evaluating voucher efficacy, addressing questions about everything from student achievement to private profiteering.

What about the politicians? Lamar Alexander seems the likeliest to raise these issues thoughtfully in the 2000 election campaign; as a former Tennessee governor and the Secretary of Education under George Bush, he knows more about schooling than any other presidential aspirant. He has also been down this road before. Alexander bears scars from his ill-fated 1992 struggle to enact a voucher test at the federal level. Called the G.I. Bill for Kids, the plan would have spent $500 million in new federal dollars to give the parents of half a million low- and middle-income children each a $1,000 voucher to use at the schools of their choice. Alexander wagered (correctly) that conservative groups would be content with tiny sums of new money to get their foot in the door, and (incorrectly) that new cash for schools would be something the unions couldn't be seen opposing. In a Democratic Congress the bill went nowhere. Today Alexander says he would urge states to shift toward child-centered funding. And he'd go to Congress with an updated version of Bush's 1992 bill, featuring $1,500 per voucher and an overall $1 billion price tag.

I asked Alexander if he wasn't thinking too small: $1,500 vouchers would be nowhere near sufficient to spark the creation of new schools. And with vouchers spread thin across the country, he would get no trial of how broad-based choice can improve schooling in a community. Why not try the 20 percent spending boost in exchange for universal vouchers in a few cities?

The voluble Alexander went silent for perhaps fifteen seconds as he considered whether to go on record in favor of a policy that would raise spending substantially—something that conservative primary voters would reject.

At length he said yes. Higher per-pupil spending wouldn't be his preferred solution, of course, but if that's what it took to get a bold voucher plan into failing cities, he'd live with it. "I would go high because the stakes are high," he explained, "and to expose the hypocrisy of the unions. If I told the National Education Association that we'd double it in the five largest cities, they wouldn't take it."

Was he right? I met with Bob Chase, the president of the National Education Association, in the union's headquarters in Washington. He made the familiar case for why vouchers are ineffectual today and would be a threatening distraction for public schools if tried more broadly. Only 25 percent of the adult population has children in the schools, he explained. We need to help the other 75 percent understand why financial support of schools is important. In this regard I sketched the deal: a handful of cities, higher spending, but only through vouchers. My tape recorder captured the staccato response.

Democrats should see large-scale urban voucher programs as an opportunity, not a threat.

"Is there any circumstance under which that would be something that . . ."

"No."

". . . you guys could live with? Why?"

"No."

"Double school spending . . ."

"No."

". . . in inner cities?"

"No."

"Triple it . . ."

"No."

". . . but give them a voucher?"

"'Cause, one, that's not going to happen. I'm not going to answer a hypothetical [question] when nothing like that is ever possible."

"But teachers use hypotheticals every day."

"Not in arguments like this we don't. . . . It's pure and simply not going to happen. I'm not even going to use the intellectual processes to see if in fact that could work or not work, because it's not going to happen. That's a fact."

Sandra Feldman was similarly unwilling to consider such a plan. If new money is available for cities, both said, it should be spent to improve the existing system. They would fund pay raises to attract teachers to work downtown, turnaround programs for troubled schools, and general urban programs for health, nutrition, and parenting skills. Of course, pay raises—or smaller class sizes, or any specific reform—could happen under vouchers, if that's what schools felt was needed to attract students.

IF one believes that urban education won't improve under the same approach that has failed for years, the path to progress through vouchers follows a simple logic. A progressive hand is needed to pursue the benefits of vouchers without risk to the poor. A number of conservatives are open to such efforts if they make possible larger voucher trials. Given the disastrous state of many urban schools, the Democratic Party should be the natural home of this progressive influence. It is not, because teachers' unions loom large in Democratic fundraising and campaigns. Yet the Republicans' commitment to minorities will probably never be trusted to carry this issue alone. And, not unreasonably, Republicans are unlikely to increase spending for urban schools without ensuring that such increases are tied to systemwide reform.

Changing the Democratic Party's approach to vouchers is therefore the only way to do something serious for urban children anytime soon. This conclusion begets another political syllogism, and an opportunity. Most observers believe that if the NAACP embraced vouchers, it would force the unions to reassess their opposition. Teacher intransigence is sustainable only as long as minority leaders support it, because the children whose future is being blighted are mostly black and Hispanic. Yet as Kweisi Mfume makes clear, getting the NAACP to change its stance would require voucher plans much bolder and more comprehensive than today's pilots.

Thus thinking bigger makes progress likelier. "That's why I've taken the more radical side," explains Floyd Flake, who quit Congress to run his church school and pursue these issues. "It's the only way to force the debate."

At some level even the unions know that their stonewalling is indefensible. "I would never argue with an individual parent who wanted to figure out a way to get his or her child into a better situation," Sandra Feldman says. "But to me, as a matter of public policy, that's not a good argument. The objective is to make the schools good—not to escape them."

But what if the ability to escape might help to make the schools better? And what if testing this proposition can't make anyone worse off? Yes, big voucher plans may require an act of faith, but it wouldn't be the first gamble in American education to work. A much smaller federal government rolled the dice on land-grant colleges in the 1860s with only a notion of what would happen; the research they sparked made U.S. agriculture the world's most productive. The G.I. Bill helped to spawn the postwar middle class. The moral urgency of today's voucher gamble is much greater. For all these reasons, Democrats should see large-scale urban voucher programs as an opportunity, not a threat. After all, once they embraced such a grand bargain, Democrats would be in the driver's seat. They retain, at least for now, the moral authority to speak in behalf of the disadvantaged, and Republicans would not be able to shrink from solutions they have long sought. The alternative is a Democratic Party that favors its funders at the expense of its constituents.

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The Baltimore Sun, May 12, 1999

Lesson for public schools when choice is in equation

Discontent: The unexpected number of city school applicants for scholarships to private schools in Baltimore can't help but send a message that students and parents want something better from public education.

By MIKE BOWLER
Baltimore Sun Staff

We knew they were there. We just didn't know their startling numbers.

Late last fall, as part of a national program, group of prominent Baltimoreans launched a private scholarship program aimed at low-income Baltimore students. In a mere five months -- without publicity or newspaper and television advertising -- the sponsors attracted 20,145 applicants, an estimated 15,000 of them from city public school families.

That's an astonishing figure. It means that nearly a quarter of all city elementary and middle school pupils would abandon public education. (The exact number is hard to determine because 30 percent of the first 500 scholarships will go to students already in private schools.)

It also means thousands of parents are willing to dig into their pockets to pay tuition and fees not covered by the scholarships.

Suzanna Duvall, director of the Children's Scholarship Fund of Baltimore, said she "almost fell out of my chair" when she heard early on that the city's proportion of eligible applicants was the highest in the nation.

Final tabulations showed 44 percent of eligible families in Baltimore applied, nearly twice the national average, 24 percent.
The organizers were clever. They took full advantage of word-of-mouth, and they employed the communications apparatus of the Archdiocese of Baltimore, which will take on the bulk of the scholarship winners. (Baltimore Roman Catholic schools have 2,800 vacancies.)

They also refrained from indicting public schools, and they kept politics out of the program, in part by enlisting the support of prominent Democrats who might otherwise see in this private effort a step toward publicly financed school vouchers.

A couple of crucial questions remain: Are the parents of those 20,145 applicants "profoundly dissatisfied with their current -- and only -- option in education," as the program's co-founder, financier Theodore J. Forstmann, maintained? Or do they simply see a better alternative in private schools?

We know now that there's pent-up demand for school choice in the city. And we know that poor parents do care about the education of their children.
It would be good to think that the people who run public schools have taken note of the Children's Scholarship Fund and the lode it is mining. Middle-class parents always have had available school alternatives. Now low-income parents have them, too. School choice has landed in Baltimore.

What if massacre had been in inner-city Denver?

What if a massacre like the one in Littleton had occurred a few miles away in inner-city Denver? What if shooters and most of their victims had been black?

The media would have descended on Denver, but in nowhere near the mass. National reporters would have stayed a week in Colorado, not a month. Funerals would have been covered in all their lachrymose detail, but the media wouldn't have attempted to interview third cousins of the school principal's wife.

Only a few expert psychologists and psychiatrists – not every shrink who ever saw a teen-ager – would have been interviewed about teen violence and what to do about it.

The Rev. Jesse L. Jackson would have taken the mothers of the shooters under his wing and appeared with them on ""Nightline."

Radio talk-show hosts and columnists wouldn't have asked: How could it happen here, where suburban kids are so well-behaved? Instead, their question would have been: When will inner-city violence ever end, and what can we do to stop it?

Gun-control advocates would have declared that the shooting demonstrated again the ready availability of guns in the cities. The National Rifle Association would have gone on, full bore, with its national convention in Denver.

The internet would have been fired up, but only for a few days. Chat room participants would have become bored with the tragedy, and the May epidemic of school bomb threats wouldn't have occurred.

The USA Today, April 19, 1999

Today's debate: School vouchers

Eager response to offer of private scholarships raises fears, hopes

OUR VIEW **1 million parents apply, making this a key voucher experiment.**

Forget the Powerball lottery. This week, 1 million low-income parents are competing for the chance to win a different type of jackpot: scholarships that will partially fund four years at a private school.

On Wednesday, the Children's Scholarship Fund, a private, philanthropic group, will announce the recipients of its national offer to provide 40,000 educational vouchers worth $170 million for students in kindergarten through eighth grade.

This isn't the first time a group has offered to pick up the private school tuition tab for low-income students. But it's by far the biggest such give-away. And the fact that so many families applied guarantees controversy.

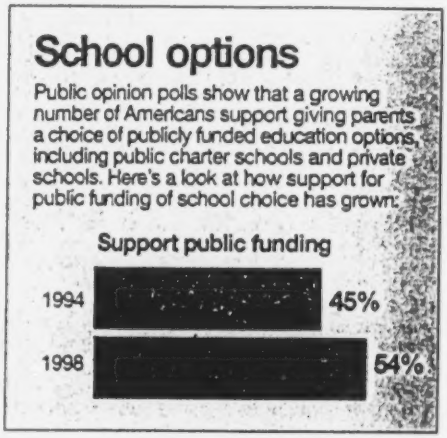
Voucher opponents will see it as a precursor to publicly funded voucher programs that could starve public schools of financial and parental support. Voucher supporters will point to the 1 million applicants — including nearly 70,000 who faxed or called on the last day — as proof that urban schools are failing students. They'll say vouchers are needed to force public schools to make needed changes.

But there's a less incendiary way to view these private scholarships: They offer a low-risk way to gather much-needed research on vouchers without committing scarce public education dollars.

To date, research on small-scale publicly funded voucher experiments and private scholarship programs fails to answer a basic question: Will either reduce the learning gap between rich and poor kids?

Public voucher experiments under way in Milwaukee and Cleveland aren't shedding much light. In Cleveland, educational results are muddled. And in Milwaukee, data showing significant math gains for children in their fourth year of the program are disputed.

What's needed is a high-quality research study, with scientifically selected control groups. So far, that kind of research base is being gathered only in New York City for an existing private scholarship program. The first-year results there show modest gains in the early grades, more significant gains among the upper elementary grades.


School options
Public opinion polls show that a growing number of Americans support giving parents a choice of publicly funded education options, including public charter schools and private schools. Here's a look at how support for public funding of school choice has grown:
Support public funding
1994
45%
1998
54%

With this scholarship offer, the New York research will continue, and other research will be started in Washington and Dayton, Ohio.

Vouchers have come to symbolize the end of public schools as we knew them, which is why they draw outsized controversy. But as a school-reform option, they are unlikely to live up to their supporters' wildest dreams or their opponents' worst fears.

For starters, there aren't enough seats in low-tuition private schools to turn voucher programs into anything more than a niche reform in urban districts with failing schools — an escape hatch for determined students.

Given that reality, it is more likely vouchers will become a bit player alongside larger-scale reforms, such as the push by states to raise public school standards, the formation of public charter schools and the effort to turn failing public schools over to independent contractors.

But before that happens, this week's national award of private tuition vouchers provides a welcome chance to settle an important question: Do vouchers work?

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The Washington Post, May 9, 1999

The Public Revolution Private Money Might Bring

By Terry M. Moe

American education is in the midst of a revolution. In another decade or two, we'll look back at the 1990s as a truly pivotal time—and at certain events that were especially influential. One of them began last summer, when businessmen Theodore Forstmann and John Walton announced the creation of the Children's Scholarship Fund to provide poor urban students in grades K-8 with scholarships—privately funded vouchers—so they might attend the private school of their choice.

Forstmann and Walton each donated $50 million. They then raised $70 million from donors in 43 participating cities and put together a board of directors of leading figures from both political parties. In the meantime, they orchestrated an aggressive media outreach campaign—including public service announcements by baseball star Sammy Sosa and poet Maya Angelou and an appearance by Forstmann on the Oprah Winfrey show—to spread the word about the program and attract applicants from around the country.

Last month, the Children's Scholarship Fund held lotteries in those 43 cities, and 40,000 low-income children were chosen randomly from the pool of applicants to receive scholarships beginning in the fall. The eligibility requirements vary from city to city. The vouchers allow these children—most of whom are in inner-city public schools—to search for better alternatives in the private sector. This is a wonderful thing for these children. And 40,000 is a big number. But consider this: More than a million disadvantaged students applied for the vouchers—44 percent of the 46,000 students eligible in Baltimore applied by phone, by mail or online, according to the fund, as did one-third of those eligible in New York City, Newark, Philadelphia, New Orleans and Washington. This is a stunning development and an undeniable indicator of the tremendous pent-up demand among the poor for new educational opportunities.

These families are not just responding to an offer of free money. The vouchers range in value from $600 to $1,700, which is less than most private school tuition. Elementary tuition at Catholic and other religious schools—which most of these kids will presumably attend—is about $2,000 nationwide. To make up the difference, a family must come up with roughly $1,000, on average. The program is designed this way to make families stakeholders in the effort, even though it may be difficult for them financially: The average income of recipient families is $18,000 to $20,000 a year.

I am not poor. But as a parent, I have experienced the need for school choice firsthand. My daughter found her public high school in Palo Alto too big and impersonal, and she simply turned off to academic work. Eventually, she transferred to a local private school that is small and informal, and five months later she is thriving. This story had a happy ending, however, only because I had enough money to exercise choice. Why shouldn't everyone be able to do the same—especially the poor, who need it most?

The Children's Scholarship Fund is a bold attempt to do something about this. It is not the only private voucher program, just the biggest. The idea was pioneered by J. Patrick Rooney, who set up the first program in Indianapolis in 1991—and created a fast-growing movement. Besides the Children's Scholarship Fund, there are 41 private programs providing about 13,000 inner-city kids with scholarships. Even as such programs continue to grow, however, they cannot hope to bring new opportunities to more than a tiny portion of those who want them. Only the government can do that. The obvious question is: Why shouldn't the government provide the inner-city poor with education vouchers?

If you ask the people who are most affected, you won't get any argument. In poll after poll, the strongest supporters of publicly financed vouchers are blacks, Hispanics and the poor, especially in urban areas. It is no accident, moreover, that the only two publicly financed voucher programs in the nation—one in Milwaukee (beginning in 1990), the other in Cleveland (1996)—are targeted at the poor in cities known for low-performing public schools. Both programs are hugely popular with parents.

Why don't we have more of these programs? There are two major reasons. The first is that vouchers threaten the established interests in public education, particularly teachers unions. They don't want any students or resources leaving the public system, and they see vouchers as their worst nightmare. They have used their considerable clout as contributors to Democratic campaigns to insist that their allies vote "no" every time the issue comes up. Which virtually all Democrats have done.

The second is that the NAACP and most other civil rights groups have clung to their traditional view—too often a valid one in the distant past—that school choice leads to more segregation, as whites flee minorities. They have long put their trust in government controls, and they have weighed in against vouchers even when proposals are designed to assist the inner-city poor.

This power lineup has turned the usual alliances in American politics upside down. The inner-city poor are typically represented in education politics by Democrats, civil rights groups and teachers unions. But their "representatives" fiercely oppose them where vouchers are concerned. As a result, the urban poor have turned to Republicans, conservatives and business groups—who usually oppose them on social issues but sometimes support them on vouchers. This is the new politics of education, in which the progressives defend a failing status quo and the conservatives battle for change on behalf of the poor.

Terry Moe is a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution, a professor of political science at Stanford University and the author of a forthcoming book on vouchers and public opinion.

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So far, opponents have been powerful enough to defeat vouchers almost every time. But the exceptions—Milwaukee and Cleveland—have proven enormously influential and have increased the pressure for vouchers elsewhere. The opponents have been helpless to stop the proliferation of private voucher programs, which is expanding the urban constituency for vouchers and generating hard evidence for policy makers that these programs can indeed work.

The opponents will keep winning most of the public voucher battles for a while, but this won't last for long. Here is what to expect in the years ahead:

- Support for vouchers will continue to grow in the inner cities as voucher programs—especially private ones—spread. Low-income parents won't be willing to wait for public school reforms that are supposedly just around the corner but never come—or never work. They will demand new educational opportunities now—which is just what vouchers give them.
- Growing numbers of Democrats will support vouchers. Democrats are already terribly uncomfortable opposing the inner-city poor and defending school systems that the people themselves want to leave. As vouchers catch on, many Democrats will escape the unions' grip and move back to their traditional constituency among the poor.
- Eventually, civil rights groups will switch sides. They are already under pressure from their grass-roots constituents to reevaluate their position on vouchers. This will only intensify in the years ahead. Once civil rights groups embrace vouchers, the unions will be isolated, and the game will be over. The civil rights groups will then hold the balance of power in voucher politics and will have tremendous influence in the design and location of voucher programs. This is another reason for them to jump in with both feet, and earlier rather than later.

I'm convinced that the fight for inner-city vouchers is destined to succeed. It will bring new opportunities to millions of disadvantaged children, and new vitality to urban public schools—which will henceforth have to perform at a higher standard to keep students. My guess, moreover, is that other families, wherever they live, will want the same opportunities, and that the momentum for change will naturally move well beyond the inner city—and transform the rest of the education system.

The Children's Scholarship Fund is a harbinger of all this. It is history in the making.

The New York Times, May 2, 1999

Public School Choice, at a Price

Many Paying to Transfer Children to More Affluent Districts

By JOSEPH BERGER

MOUNT VERNON, N.Y., April 28 — Len Sarver is on the school board here, so it is not surprising that he sends his 13-year-old son, Josh, to public school. But what bothers some school officials here is that he does not send Josh to public school in Mount Vernon.

Instead, Mr. Sarver pays $6,500 a year so that Josh can attend middle school in the more prosperous adjacent town of Pelham, where, Mr. Sarver believes, Josh can get a more rigorous and safer education. "I'm certainly not going to jeopardize my child physically or educationally," said Mr. Sarver, an electrical contractor, explaining why he has spurned the schools he helps govern.

Throughout Westchester County, much of New York State and in several other states, including Illinois, Pennsylvania and Maine, parents are exercising an expensive and little-studied form of school choice, spending between $4,000 and $12,000 to send their children to public schools outside their hometowns.

But as this arrangement has emerged willy-nilly — through casual decisions by random school districts with little direction from the state governments — educators are grappling with the fact that most of the students who transfer seem to live in more urban suburbs like Mount Vernon, Yonkers and Port Chester with large populations of black and Hispanic students, and they end up attending schools in leafy, overwhelmingly white districts like Pelham, Bronxville, Tuckahoe and Rye. In fact, Mr. Sarver says one reason he chose Pelham is that he does not want Josh to attend a school where he is one of only a small group of white children.

Educators and families say that those who pay tuition for public school do so mainly because they feel their home schools do not match those across the border, yet they do not want the religious ambiance of a parochial school or the exclusivity of a private one. The parents believe they are getting good value. In the latest state report cards, 93 percent of Pelham's third graders read above grade level, compared with 49 percent of Mount Vernon's.

But some school officials in New York say that the state, by tolerating such transfers, inadvertently injures struggling communities like Mount Vernon, allowing the neighboring districts to skim off some of those cities' brightest students and making it even harder to provide integrated education. "It removes the better kids from the system," said Ronald O. Ross, the new Superintendent of Mount Vernon, where more than 90 percent of the district's 9,800 students are black or Hispanic. "Whatever problems we have, it makes it more difficult. It creates the impression that we are not doing our job."

Yet some officials point out that banning the practice would be futile, citing the experience of Bergen County in New Jersey. In 1985, high school students from the well-off enclave of Englewood Cliffs, which has no high school, began paying for school in Tenafly, another comfortable white community, rather than their historic destination: Dwight Morrow High School in Englewood, whose students increasingly were black. When a series of rulings required Englewood Cliffs students to return to Dwight Morrow, virtually every family put their children in private schools.

As the country experiments increasingly with school choice and vouchers, the 50 states seem to have a hodgepodge of policies on whether students can pay to attend a neighboring district's public schools. Illinois, which, unlike New York, does keep track of such students, counts 13,119 whose families are paying for them to attend public school outside their home districts. Until this school year, Wisconsin allowed receiving districts to charge a limited tuition, but then joined Minnesota, Arizona, Iowa, Oregon and 11 other states in expanding choice by requiring districts to accept outsiders at no charge if they have the space.

To promote integration, Massachusetts permits black and Hispanic students in cities like Boston or Springfield to transfer for free to suburban districts. California, however, bars transfers of white students out of cities like San Francisco because these assignments chip away at integration.

Gary Orfield, a professor of education at Harvard and an expert on integration plans, contends that "the policy ought to be to discourage transfers that undermine existing desegregation plans and encourage transfers that increase the possibility of desegregation."

Other experts take a contradictory view. Stephan Thernstrom, a Harvard history professor who with his wife, Abigail, wrote a critical 1997 study of race-based policies, "America in Black and White: One Nation Indivisible," said that a generation of experience with integration plans had shown that they were "of questionable educational benefit" and did not enhance black achievement. "I think integration is an important value," he said, "but parental choice is an even more important one, so in that trade-off I would opt for parental choice."

In Westchester, the number of students that any single district receives from outside is not great — 30 or 40 is typical — but the collective impact can be considerable, since transferring students are concentrated in middle school and high school and since a single district like Mount Vernon can lose students to several neighbors. Yet New York State, where only 15 percent of black students and 14 percent of Latino students attend schools with white majorities, has never adopted a policy encouraging or barring tuition-paying transfers.

"It's a local issue, it's a parental issue, it's a family issue, and parents are free to make those choices," said Bill Hirschen, a spokesman for the State Education Department.

Not all suburban districts accept tuition-paying students. Scarsdale's school clerk, Lois Rehm, said residents feel it would be unfair for out-of-towners to get the benefits of Scarsdale's schools while avoiding the high costs of living in Scarsdale.

Superintendents of the Westchester districts that accept outside students are frank in saying they do so because the costs are minimal and the money can be used to add teachers. Ardsley's 30 tuition students, who come from Yonkers, Dobbs Ferry, Greenburgh and Elmsford, pay $8,500 apiece for elementary school and $10,500 for high school. "It's close to 1 percent of our tax rate," said Dr. Stanley Toll, Superintendent of the Ardsley schools. "If the students weren't here, the residents would be paying 1 percent more."

Generally, tuition-paying students are admitted only in classes where there are vacancies. Most districts screen out students with academic or behavioral problems.

Several Westchester Superintendents said they did not think a state policy barring tuition-paying transfers would have any impact on the racial mix of schools, since parents unhappy with home districts would then send their children to private schools.

"If they're going to spend $10,000 to send their kids to Ardsley, they have a lot of options out there," Dr. Toll said. Private school tuition for sixth grade in New York and New Jersey averages $14,100 a year, according to the National Association of Independent Schools. At Roman Catholic schools, it ranges from $2,000 to $10,000.

Dr. Charles D. Coletti, Superintendent in Port Chester, which loses students to Rye City, believes state policy should permit students to transfer elsewhere only for programs his schools do not offer. He suspects that in his district, which sends 84 percent of its graduates to college and offers a full palette of advanced placement courses, it is not quality that prompts families to emigrate. Some parents, he suggests, do not want their children attending schools where the student body is 65 percent Hispanic and 10 percent black.

"People make decisions on the basis of wanting their children exposed to a culturally diverse population or not wanting their children exposed to a culturally diverse population, and you can read the code words into that," he said.

Visits to middle schools in Mount Vernon and Pelham point up some of the sharp contrasts that, in the minds of some families, justify their decision to switch districts. Pelham Middle School, where many students come from affluent families, is a cheerful building facing a verdant athletic field. It is so well equipped that shop students can build wooden bridges and test their durability against earthquakes. At Mount Vernon's Alfred M. Franko Middle School, where many children qualify for free lunch, obscene graffiti were scrawled on lockers, and a science teacher appealed to the Superintendent for ventilation hoods so he could perform chemical experiments.

The Mount Vernon school district spends $10,000 per student while Pelham spends more than $12,000. Each of Pelham's 156 eighth graders must take the Regents test in earth science, and 95 percent pass; at Franko, 40 of the 258 eighth graders took the test last year and 31 passed. The percentage of Mount Vernon students suspended last year was more than four times that of Pelham students.

The 12 Mount Vernon junior high school students who made the switch to Pelham — two of whom are black — say it was not easy making new friends and enduring longer trips to school. But they were drawn by Pelham's distinct advantages.

"It's not that my parents aren't happy with Mount Vernon," said Chad Northern, a black seventh grader at Pelham. "It's just that they wanted something better."

Barbara Snyder, an eighth grader, said Pelham offered sports like lacrosse and field hockey that Mount Vernon could not, and far more honors classes. Michael Lynch, an eighth grader, who, like Barbara, is white, said he switched "because Mount Vernon's schools were kind of dangerous." Although he said "there are stories of kids being cut up by knives and gangs walking around," he had not heard any firsthand accounts. Still, Mount Vernon's reputation suffered a severe setback in 1994 when a student was stabbed to death in a high school hallway dispute.

Mr. Sarver, one of four white members of a nine-member board that has been deeply divided along racial lines, acknowledged some racial consideration in his decision. He did not want Josh attending a school where whites would account for only a small percentage of the student body — something that was not the case at his son's racially balanced elementary school in Mount Vernon or in the polyglot neighborhood in north Mount Vernon where the Sarvers live. "I want him to have the opportunity of meeting different groups, but I also want him to have a chance to be in a white group as well," Mr. Sarver said.

In Mount Vernon, families who put their children in neighboring districts seem to irritate some school officials. Mr. Sarver's decision seems particularly to chafe at Mr. Ross, the Mount Vernon Superintendent. "It's ironic that someone who sits on the board and makes decisions for other people's children refuses to send their children to those schools," Mr. Ross said.

The New York Times, May 25, 1999

Turning the Tables on School Choice

By CHARLES WHEELAN
The New York Times

Allow me to propose a thought experiment for my fellow Democrats. Imagine Trent Lott puffing himself up in the well of the Senate and announcing a new Republican education proposal. (Another Republican Senator can be substituted here; Jesse Helms would work nicely.)

The major elements of this proposal are the following: Two parallel school systems will be set up. One will be for poor, predominantly minority students in cities. These schools, housed in crumbling buildings, will offer a low-quality curriculum, stultifying bureaucracy and few extracurricular activities. The other system will be for affluent students, who will be able to choose either to enroll in a private school or move to the suburb with the public school that they favor most. Poor students will not have such a choice; they must attend schools in their neighborhoods.

Imagine Trent (or Jesse or Strom) pounding the lectern, saying, "Under no circumstances will public money be used to allow poor students to attend any school but the one to which they have been assigned!"

How would Democrats react to such a plan? They would rightfully blast it as unfair, racist, inefficient and detrimental to the long-term economic health of the country. Why, then, are they so wedded to the education status quo, which is really nothing more than the hypothetical Republican plan that I have just described?

The Democrats are on the wrong side of the school choice issue. The political explanation for this decision is pathetically simple. The National Education Association, the nation's largest teachers union, is consistently one of the top soft-money contributors to the Democratic Party. At the state level, where education policy is often shaped, the teachers unions are always a potent force. And because the N.E.A. opposes school choice with every fiber of its existence, supporting vouchers would be political suicide for aspiring Democratic candidates.

What is more disturbing (and less easily explained) is that the Democratic Party's intellectual leaders, many of whom are either outside of politics or entrenched enough to withstand an assault from the unions, have attacked school choice with superficial complaints that are far from the heart of the debate.

Democrats say that vouchers will destroy the public schools. This statement makes a great sound bite, but it is probably a better argument in favor of school choice. The supposed logic is that millions of students will stream out of the public schools if given the opportunity, leaving behind a shell of a system. There are two problems with this logic. First, if students – especially the "best" students -- will flee public schools like rats from a sinking ship, then what makes this system so worth protecting? And second, the essence of "public" education is that the government provides an opportunity for all students to attend a decent school, not that all students must attend a publicly operated school. Do we believe that the spirit of Medicare has been compromised because the system uses private hospitals and doctors?

Vouchers will benefit wealthy families who already send their children to private schools. So what? Democrats are at their absolute ugliest when they assume that punishing the rich

and the middle class is the same as helping the poor. Is there some logical reason that a family paying $60,000 or $80,000 in taxes should not have the right to a subsidized education at a school they deem excellent? More important, vouchers will bolster urban tax bases by stemming the flight of middle-class parents who move out of the city because they do not trust urban public schools and cannot afford private ones. Vouchers are pro-city, which is something that we Democrats are supposed to care about.

Some parents won't exercise their right to choose, or will make a bad choice. Perhaps, but there is ample evidence -- for example, in Milwaukee and Cleveland -- that low-income parents will make a great effort to take advantage of voucher programs. When did it become morally acceptable to punish some parents and children for the bad decisions that other parents might make? The Democratic Party has rarely been so patronizing toward the poor.

Democrats also argue that school choice must be a bad idea if the Republicans are so excited about it. Ignore the stupidity of this logic for a moment and recall some recent history. The Republicans were the party of civil rights in the 1950's (with the strongest opposition coming from Southern Democrats). The Democrats took the issue away from them and have done quite well with it.

There are good reasons to move deliberately on school choice. Most important, the data on how effective vouchers would be in improving student achievement are far from conclusive. Several small programs offer reasons to be optimistic. But we don't know that school choice will leave students radically better off, even if we have strong theoretical reasons to believe that it might.

Also, the devil is in the details with voucher plans. How will schools select students? Will parents be able to add money on to the value of their voucher? What schools will be able to accept public dollars? Can religious schools legally participate? How will students with special needs be integrated into the system?

These are the issues that we need to be discussing. But we should stop clinging defensively to a system that, if it were presented to us fresh today, we would blast for what it is: an assault on the poor, a waste of resources and a disgrace to the principles that the Democratic Party stands for.

First Things, April 1999

Is Private Schooling Privatizing?

Christian Smith and David Sikkink

Question: Are families that choose private schools and home education for their children more likely than families involved in public schools to be socially isolated and withdrawn from participation in civic life?

Answer: Absolutely not. In fact, to the contrary, recent survey data from the U.S. Department of Education show that Catholic, Protestant, and nonreligious private schooling and home schooling families are consistently *more* involved in a wide spectrum of civic activities than are families of public school children. From voting to volunteering to visiting the local library, private and home schooling families are very much out in their communities and involved in the affairs of public life. Private schooling, it turns out, is anything but privatizing.

These empirical findings have important implications for the increasingly hot debates over school choice, tuition vouchers, Christian schools, and home education. For in the last two decades, many Americans have grown increasingly concerned about our nation's capacity to sustain a shared moral order and robust public life. In 1985, for example, Robert Bellah and his colleagues warned in *Habits of the Heart* that American individualism is eroding the republican and biblical commitments that sustain a vigorous civic life. Mary Ann Glendon's 1991 book *Rights Talk: The Impoverishment of Political Discourse* argued that a rampant rights-discourse is now undermining our shared American values and the common good. And in the mid-1990s, Robert Putnam warned in his noted articles, "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital" and "The Strange Disappearance of Civic America," that Americans are increasingly withdrawing from public participation into their own narrow, self-interested, private worlds. Many others, including Richard John Neuhaus, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., Christopher Lasch, Alan Wolfe, Richard Sennett, Amitai Etzioni, Robert Wuthnow, and James Hunter, have sounded similar concerns. America is in real danger, many able cultural observers warn, of losing its shared cultural order and common civic life to the corrosive forces of individualism, privatization, fragmentation, and cultural polarization.

It is against this backdrop that champions of the old public school system decry our society's current move toward school choice, tuition vouchers, home schooling, and the like. With all of the cultural and institutional forces that are pulling America apart, they implore, how can we contemplate dismantling one of the last public institutions that historically have held America together? Public schools, it is argued, have not only always provided for all American children the opportunity for a genuinely liberal education; they have also served to integrate America's racial, ethnic, and religious diversity, and to teach common American cultural and political values. How can we—now, of all times—start undermining the foundations of what may be our last institutional dike against a future of social fragmentation, privatized isolation, and civic indifference?

It is important to be clear here about what counts as "civic" and "public." Critics of private schooling often equate "civic" with a narrow range of liberal and "neutral" activities, and "public" with governmental ones. Within this framework, these critics might say, sure, Christian and home schoolers are activists, but their (presumed) narrow kind of activism fragments society and undermines democracy. Our approach here relies instead on a more Tocquevillian view of civic engagement, which suggests that American democracy thrives on the widespread participation of its citizens in a host of *different kinds* of asso-

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ciations that mediate between the individual and the state, often even when those associations are not manifestly political or liberal; that the experience of association and participation itself tends to socialize, empower, and incorporate citizens in ways that stimulate democratic self-government, even if they involve some particularity and conflict in the process.

Be that as it may, many popular stereotypes about private schools and home education directly feed into concerns about the social consequences of private schooling. The popular imagination easily conjures up images of severe, anti-intellectual, Bible-thumping fundamentalist Christian schools that indoctrinate rather than educate their students; of Volvo-driving parents emerging from their affluent, gated "communities" to drop their children off at exclusive private academies the central purpose of which is to reproduce class privilege; of born-again parents, fearful of alleged secular humanism, pulling their kids out of public schools to give them amateur educations in the small worlds of their own private homes. How, one might wonder, will these kids ever learn to understand and share a society with other people very different from themselves? How can these families ever pull themselves out of what seem to be narrow worlds of religious purity, financial affluence, and family reclusivity in order to participate in a shared American public life?

Certain scholarly studies of Christian schools seem to validate these popular images, raising similarly troubling questions about private education. For example, Alan Peshkin's 1986 book *God's Choice: The Total World of a Fundamentalist Christian School* portrays one Christian academy as enveloping its members in a "total world" of exclusivistic religious meaning, isolated and withdrawn from the pluralism of mainstream American life. And Susan Rose's 1988 book *Keeping Them Out of the Hands of Satan: Evangelical Schooling in America* suggests that evangelicals are seeking through their Christian schools to establish religious enclaves within which to exercise control and enjoy autonomy from secular institutions and cultures. Once again, one might easily surmise that private schooling is indeed privatizing in ways that erode a civil, pluralistic public sphere.

These apparently antiliberal tendencies of private schooling are very troubling to some academics. In fact, Illinois Institute of Technology law professor James Dwyer has recently published what private schoolers can only view as an ominous book, *Religious Schools v. Children's Rights* (Cornell University Press, 1998), which argues for heavy state regulation of religious schools to counter pedagogical practices that Dwyer deems "damaging to children." The book "presents evidence of excessive restriction of children's basic liberties, stifling of intellectual development, the instilling of dogmatic and intolerant attitudes, as well as the infliction of psychological and emotional harm, including excessive guilt and repression and . . . diminished self-esteem." Dwyer argues that "the focus [should] always be on what is best, *from a secular perspective*, for the affected children. . . . States are obligated to ensure that such schools do not engage in harmful practices and that they provide their students with the training necessary for pursuit of a broad range of careers and for full citizenship in a pluralistic, democratic society." We see, then, that an activist (and, from some perspectives, imperialistic and paternalistic) state is thought necessary, not only because religious schools allegedly damage children, but also because they purportedly undermine the kind of broad public education and civic involvement necessary for "full citizenship in a pluralistic, democratic society." In short, Dwyer claims, private religious schooling is perniciously privatizing.

But the empirical question remains: *Is* private schooling really privatizing? Here we present evidence from a reliable national education survey which shows that—contrary to these popular stereotypes and academic critiques—private and home schooling are definitely *not* privatizing. Indeed, the data show clearly that the most privatized American families are consistently those whose children attend public schools.

Our evidence comes from the 1996 National Household Education Survey (NHES), conducted by the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics. This study surveyed a large, nationally representative sample of 9,393 parents of school-age children. The survey used carefully constructed questions to differentiate the public schoolers from Catholic schoolers, non-Catholic church-related schoolers, nonreligious private schoolers, and home schoolers.

In addition to questions about schooling, the survey asked parents questions about the extent of family involvements in a variety of civic activities. Parents reported whether they were members of a community organization; participated in an ongoing community service activity; went to the public library for books, tapes, lectures, story hours, or to use library equipment; voted in a national or state election in the previous five years; wrote or telephoned an editor or public official or signed a petition in the previous twelve months; attended a public meeting in the previous twelve months; contributed money to a political candidate, party, or cause in the previous twelve months; worked for a political cause in the previous twelve months; or participated in a protest or boycott in the previous twelve months. By comparing differences in family participation in these nine forms of civic involvement, we are able to determine empirically whether private schooling actually is or is not privatizing.

The results reveal a consistent pattern: Catholic schooling families, other Christian schooling families, nonreligious private schooling families, and home schooling families are consistently *more* involved in all of the civic activities examined than are families with children in public schools. The only two exceptions are that home schoolers are equally likely as public schoolers to attend public meetings, and that 2 percent fewer non-Catholic church-related schoolers than public schooling families have volunteered for a political cause. Otherwise, private and home schooling families are, by an average margin of 9.3 percent, more likely than public schooling families to engage in all of these forms of civic participation. Some of the larger observed differences in civic participation deserve particular mention. Up to 10 percent more private schooling than public schooling families have attended a public meeting or rally. Up to 13 percent more private schoolers have given money to political causes. Up to 15 percent more have voted in recent elections and have telephoned elected officials to express their views. And up to 26 percent more private schooling families than public schooling families are members of community groups and volunteer at local organizations. (All statistics are published at the authors' web site: <www.unc.edu/~cssmith/firstthings/index.htm>.)

These findings definitively answer the question at hand: private schooling is absolutely *not* privatizing. Private schoolers and home schoolers are definitely *not* the isolated recluses that critics suggest they might be. It is, rather, the public schooling families that are clearly the least civically involved of all the schooling types.

But the evidence that private schooling is not privatizing is even stronger than this. Most people know that participation in civic activities is strongly correlated with certain other social factors, such as people's years of education and income. We also know that, on average, private schooling families are likely to possess more education and to earn higher incomes than public schooling families. Could it be that the private schooling families' greater participation in civic activities is simply the result of their higher education and income, and has nothing to do with schooling per se?

In order to test for precisely this possibility, we used the NHES survey data to create a civic participation scale, and ran a multiple-variable regression analysis, controlling for differences in education, income, age, race, family structure, region, and the number of hours per week that parents work. The results, using even this conservative statistical test, confirm the findings presented above. Namely, Catholic schoolers, other Christian schoolers, and home schoolers (but not nonreligious private schoolers) are significantly more likely than public schoolers to participate in public life through a broad array of civic activities—even when we statistically remove the possible effects of seven other potentially related social factors. In other words, there appears to be something particular about religious private schooling and home schooling in and of themselves that increases families' participation in mostly non-school-related civic activities in the public square.

Why should this be? Fully answering that question will require much more research, but we may already know enough about the matter to venture at least a preliminary explanation.

Scholars such as James Coleman, Pierre Bourdieu, Robert Putnam, and Pamela Paxton tell us that people's civic participation tends to increase when their lives are tied into networks of relationships characterized by trust and solidarity. These kinds of associational ties form among people the "social capital"—the reciprocal, cooperative, bonding social relations—that helps to foster greater involvement in public life. This may not be the conscious goal of these networks and associations. But they tend to produce this effect nonetheless. This helps to explain at least some of the differences in civic participation among different types of schooling families. For the associations and practices of private schooling often create denser relational networks of greater solidarity and shared moral culture than those of public schooling.

Take home schooling, for example. Of all types of nonpublic education, home schooling as a practice—by so closely uniting home, family, education, and (usually) religious faith—might seem the most privatized and isolated from the concerns of the public sphere. But in fact, most home schoolers are not at all isolated. Indeed, most are embedded in dense relational networks of home schooling families; participate in local, state, regional, and national home schooling organizations; and engage in a variety of community activities and programs that serve the education of their children. Home schooling families meet together at playgrounds; frequent local libraries, museums, and zoos; organize drama productions, science projects, and art workshops; enroll their kids in YMCA soccer and swimming classes; organize home school association picnics and cookouts; and much more. Home schooling families also frequent home education conferences and seminars; pay close attention to education-related legislative issues; share political information with each other; and educate themselves about relevant legal concerns. Far from being privatized and isolated, home schooling families are typically very well networked and quite civically active.

Of course, some people do not like the purpose of home schoolers' networking and activism. But that objection is an altogether different matter than the one at hand. Presumably a broader array of involvements in public life are of civic value for democracy than those that support a liberal or pro-public school

agenda. The relevant fact here is that social capital generates the civic participation that strengthens public life, whether or not this is the primary intentional goal of the association—social capital simply has this unintended effect.

Private schoolers do more than network, though. They also frequently generate and sustain *shared moral cultures* that facilitate social solidarity and trust. This too generates social capital.

Compare this situation with the reality of contemporary public schooling. Years ago, public schools served as institutional expressions of local community identities and cultures. But public schools and the experiences of families that use them have been radically transformed by decades of increased geographical mobility and social transience; educational centralization, standardization, and professionalization; federal government intervention; economic integration and globalization; and the imperialism of the market.

No longer principally centers of local community identity and moral order, public schools have increasingly become impersonal state bureaucracies supplying standardized schooling services to potentially anonymous taxpaying consumers. Public school parents need not know one another to receive the services public schools offer. Nor do they need to share a common moral culture. Indeed, contemporary public schools are by law intentionally "neutral" spaces that, in keeping with liberal political theory, exclude the particularities of distinct moral and religious traditions in favor of a standardized secular perspective. Shared particularistic moral cultures are not only awkward and potentially contentious in public schools, they are by definition prohibited. Yet we know that associations which lack the collective solidarity and trust that shared moral cultures engender fail to form for their participants the social capital that fosters participation in civic life. And partly for this reason public schooling families are consistently the least civically active of all of our schooling types.

By contrast, private Catholic schools, other Christian schools, home schools, and even nonreligious private schools are much more likely to be based upon particularistic religious, moral, and other normatively committed traditions that embed their participating families in shared moral cultures that foster social solidarity and trust. Despite contemporary society's widespread transience and market penetration of social life, private schools manage nevertheless to draw groups of families together around shared, fundamental, normative worldviews. And this, as we have seen, in turn fosters among private schoolers levels of broad civic participation significantly greater than those of public schooling families. In this way, committed religious and moral particularity appears more capable of sustaining a vibrant common American public life than secular liberalism's purported neutrality regarding visions of the good life and society.

All of this has implications for broader debates among liberals, communitarians, and others about just what kind of society we ought to be working to form. Liberal political theorists contend that a just society is one in which the particularistic moral perspectives of the diverse communities that comprise it are excluded from debate in the public square. Instead, people should only employ justifications in their arguments in public life that all participants in the debate will find acceptable—which for liberals inevitably means *secular* justifications. Thus, people should be obliged to restrain themselves from bringing into the public square arguments grounded in the authorities of their own particularistic traditions, religious or otherwise. In a liberal society, the public square must be secular and "neutral" as to particular visions of "the good," and its citizens must leave behind the particularistic commitments and traditions that form their identities and viewpoints (or at least must be ready to reformulate them into secular language).

Communitarian theorists argue by contrast that liberalism's unencumbered selves are nothing but theoretical fictions; that stripping certain citizens and communities of their moral particularities fundamentally violates their identities and moral reasoning; that not all participants in public debate in fact find secular justifications for arguments acceptable, so that this requirement simply functions imperialistically to privilege secular moral reasoning over others; and, finally, that no society can avoid specifying and embracing substantive public notions of virtue and goodness. These are compelling critiques. Yet communitarianism—as Michael Walzer and others have noted—often ends up then characterizing society as if it were or should be one whole community of citizens whose shared virtues undergird a strong civic republic (see, for example, Walzer's "A Community of Communities," in Anita Allen and Milton Ragan's *Debating Democracy's Discontent*, Oxford University Press, 1998). And this communitarian vision itself tends to gloss over the very real and very distinctive identities, traditions, and communities that communitarians claim liberal theory fails adequately to acknowledge and embrace.

An alternative to both liberalism's secular "neutrality" and communitarianism's holistic civic republicanism is the structural pluralist conception of society as, in Walzer's words, "a community of communities, a nation of nationalities, a social union of social unions." This vision fully acknowledges and accepts *in public life* the many real and distinctive social communities of people whose lives are fundamentally formed by particularistic moral traditions

that mold unique social identities. Particularistic communities and their members are, in this approach, recognized and allowed to live out their social lives and to contribute to the common good in terms of who they actually *are*—instead of being required either to strip themselves of their basic identities and commitments before entering the public square, or to affirm as ultimate the substantive virtues that all members of the one civic republic share.

In the field of education, structural pluralism would affirm the necessity of public *funding* of education, but would allow for institutional pluralism in the *provision* of education. Communities of parents would be allowed to form distinctively Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Muslim, secular humanist, or other schools (or home education associations) whose curricula and practices would respect and reflect the fundamental worldviews and intellectual and moral traditions of the families involved. At the same time, all students in all schools and associations would engage a common core curriculum, established by the state in consultation with the relevant communities, ensuring a common baseline education for all citizens. This, many Americans might be surprised to know, is precisely the way public education has been structured for most of this century in the Netherlands, and very successfully at that.

Rather than fostering social conflict, this structural pluralist approach actually tends to allay social conflict by allowing communities and their people legitimately to live out in public life their distinctive beliefs and practices. By contrast, it is in fact our own current winner-take-all situation of a uniform public educational "neutrality" that represents, in the words of University of Massachusetts-Amherst legal scholar Stephen Arons, a "short route to chaos." Furthermore, our empirical evidence on the civic involvement of different kinds of schooling families affords no reason to think that loosening the secular state's monopoly on the provision of public education will privatize and isolate Americans or diminish their participation in civic life. If anything, such changes promise the opposite effect.

The American public, state legislatures, major metropolitan school districts, and state and federal courts are becoming every year more friendly to the ideas of school choice, tuition vouchers, home schooling, and other innovative educational initiatives that challenge the monopoly of government-provided public schooling. Increasingly, we as a society see that it is not only possible but also perhaps more just and effective to separate in our thinking and policy making the state's essential public funding of education from an exclusive state provision of education. This fundamental shift in thinking raises a number of very important questions about equity and integration that require careful public deliberation and decision making.

One of these critical questions concerns the practical effects on our common public life of changing the rules of the education game to allow the public funding of private and home schooling. Will moves in this direction erode America's shared civic culture? Will this undermine civic participation by encouraging further social fragmentation along religious and other ideological fault lines? Will private schooling and home education foster the kind of privatization that so many cultural critics now warn so strongly against?

Whatever else can be said for and against private schooling and home education, the one thing our empirical findings make clear is that neither of them foster the kind of social privatization and isolation that diminish people's participation in civic affairs. The empirical evidence is clear and decisive: private schoolers and home schoolers are considerably more civically involved in the public square than are public schoolers—even when the effects of differences in education, income, and other related factors are removed from the equation. Indeed, we have reason to believe that the organizations and practices involved in private and home schooling in themselves tend to foster public participation in civic affairs. If so, then we have nothing to fear, at least on this score, about embracing school choice, tuition vouchers, home schooling, and related educational innovations. These things will not encourage privatization and widespread withdrawal from public life. Rather, if anything, the challenges, responsibilities, and practices that private schooling and home education normally entail for their participants may actually help reinvigorate America's civic culture and the participation of her citizens in the public square. FT

The Washington Post, May 10, 1999

New Test in Quebec Schools

Challenges Mounting To Church's Key Role In Public Education

By Steven Pearlstein
Washington Post Foreign Service

MONTREAL—To anyone who has spent time in American parochial schools, Our Lady of Pompeii Elementary on Montreal's north side would hardly seem remarkable.

There are crucifixes on the wall of every classroom and statues of the patron saint in the corridor. When the principal enters a classroom, students stand and bid him good morning in unison. Twice a week, homeroom teachers, all of them Catholic, put aside multiplication tables and the study of vertebrates and turn their attention to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

Our Lady of Pompeii, however, is not a private parochial school; it's a fairly typical public school in Quebec. In the only French-speaking, overwhelmingly Catholic province in Canada, all public education was delegated to the churches—along with hospitals, orphanages and other social services—until 35 years ago.

And not only are there no strictures against mixing church and state, but the founding documents of Quebec expressly state that French Catholics and English Protestants are both entitled to receive religious instruction from the public schools.

Now, however, a special commission appointed by Quebec's government has proposed to change all that, sending political shock waves through a province that already is wrestling with the question of whether it wants to remain part of Canada. The commission proposed scrapping the current system of "confessional" education, in which every school, in effect, has a Catholic or Protestant affiliation.

And instead of having all students receive two hours per week of Catholic, Protestant or nonreligious "moral" instruction, the commission proposes that they be required to take classes that look at all the world's religions from cultural and historical perspectives.

"Quebec's desire to be a liberal democracy, adhering to the principles of equality and openness to residents of various backgrounds—this is simply not consistent with an educational structure that continues to give special status to the Catholic and Protestant religions," said Jean-Pierre Proulx, the University of Montreal professor and former journalist who headed the panel.

Not everyone in Quebec agrees. At a meeting in the basement of an ornate basilica in Trois Rivieres several weeks ago, Proulx was jeered by an angry crowd that accused him of being an "antichrist" and of trying to deny a central aspect of the French Canadian cultural identity.

"It was very hard for me, a shock really, even though I expected such a reaction," said Proulx, a Catholic who faithfully attends Mass at his Montreal parish.

In places like Trois Rivieres—a city 75 miles northeast of Montreal where more than 90 percent of the population remains French-speaking and Catholic—many view secularization of schools as an intrusion imposed on the rest of the province by Montreal, home to immigrants from around the world.

But the political impetus for secularization is coming not from religious minorities, but from Catholics themselves. Many of Quebec's Catholics still harbor deep resentment toward a Church whose conservative, authoritarian grip on virtually every aspect of life in this province came to an end only in the 1960s.

Today church attendance among Catholics stands at 15 percent, the lowest rate in North America, while in such cities as Montreal and Quebec City, one-third of church buildings are available for other uses. The average age of priests is approaching 65, while seminaries and convents are largely empty. And while polls show that 88 percent of Quebeckers believe in God, less than a third say they believe in the God portrayed by the Church.

Meanwhile, so many Quebec couples are forsaking marriage for common-law relationships that 53 percent of births in the province occur out of wedlock. The birthrate is the lowest in the Western world, while rates of abortion and divorce are among the highest.

It is among these disaffected Catholics that secularization has become a rallying cry. In Montreal, they recently became a majority on the French-language school board—the successor to the old Catholic School Board abolished under reforms that took effect last year. And the secularists have strong allies among the province's powerful teachers unions.

"Eventually, I feel we will come to the American system, but what Proulx has recommended would be a big step forward," said Diane de Courcy, president of the French school board, sitting in her spacious office, where the outline of a cross can still be seen in the paneling over the door. "People in Quebec still have to get comfortable with the idea that religion will be given only in churches, not schools."

Ironically, the strongest support for the system of confessional schools comes from Catholics in Montreal's predominantly Protestant English-speaking community. As a minority within a minority, English-speaking Catholics here cling tightly to their religion and their traditional lifestyle, nowhere more so than in the Italian community around Our Lady of Pompeii.

"What are we doing here?" asked Rocco Barbieri, the school principal, slamming a copy of the Proulx report on his desk. "Are we denying the existence of a Supreme Being and denying this community an important aspect of its culture in order to satisfy some intellectual's sense of justice?"

At Our Lady of Pompeii, nearly all 406 students attend Catholic religious classes at the school. And when it was time for the third-graders to celebrate their First Communion last month at the modern parish church next door, 46 of the 49 were in attendance. The school's governing council last month unanimously supported the current system of confessional schools.

It is a much different story, however, at Ecole Lanaudiere, a primary school in the gentrified Francophone neighborhood near the heart of Montreal that is now home to many of the city's artists, professors and journalists. Of the 50 third-graders at Lanaudiere, only 24 were enrolled in the Catholic education program—and of those 24, only 12 were on hand for First Communion last month at Immaculate Conception Church down the street.

> "People in Quebec still have to get comfortable with the idea that religion will be given only in churches, not schools."
>
> — Diane de Courcy
> President of the French school board in Quebec province

"I now spend more time preparing for my Catholic classes than I do for math or French—and it still doesn't work," complained Louis Thouin, who has taught at Lanaudiere for 24 years. "The kids don't want to learn or even know why they are in class. They don't go to church. There is no reinforcement at home. So what are we doing?"

Sitting in the carved, wooden pews of the grand and ornate Immaculate Conception Church, the Rev. Bernard Morin, the 70-year-old pastor, speaks for many Catholic officials when he concedes that the Church can no longer rely on the public schools as the principal vehicle for transmitting the faith.

"I am convinced we should spend much more time teaching parents to bring up the child rather than trying to teach the child directly," said Morin, who considers it a good Sunday if several hundred worshipers show up at a church that drew thousands a generation ago. "We have to give up this idea of confessional schools, work with the parents who are truly interested in religion and rebuild from there."

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The Washington Post, May 28, 1999

Ohio Court Upholds Constitutionality of School Voucher Programs

By KENNETH J. COOPER, *The Washington Post*

Ohio's Supreme Court yesterday upheld the constitutionality of a state program that provides government vouchers for Cleveland students to attend parochial schools, but struck down the controversial experiment on technical grounds based on Ohio law.

On the central constitutional question about such publicly funded vouchers, the Ohio court ruled that a Cleveland program under way since 1996 respected the separation of church and state because it is up to parents whether their children go to religious schools. Although the 3,700 low-income participants can use the $ 2,250 vouchers to pay tuition at any public or private school, most have enrolled at sectarian institutions.

The court held any link the voucher program has established between government and religion has been indirect and constitutionally permissible under the First Amendment "because [public] funds cannot reach a sectarian school unless the parents of a student decide, independently of the government, to send their child to that sectarian school."

Even though the court rejected the Cleveland voucher program, "From a national perspective, this is a definite victory for the school choice movement," said Clint Bolick, a Washington lawyer who argued for the program before the court.

Cleveland and Milwaukee operate the only government voucher programs whose stated purpose is to offer public school students educational options, including parochial schools. Both Maine and Vermont provide vouchers in rural areas that do not have their own school systems, but the vouchers cannot be used at religious institutions.

With the Ohio ruling, state supreme courts have split 2-1 in favor of the constitutionality of government vouchers being used at parochial schools. Last year, Wisconsin's highest court upheld the Milwaukee program, and the Supreme Court declined to review the case. Last month, Maine's top court ruled that using state vouchers at parochial schools would be unconstitutional.

The reason that the court cited in overturning the Cleveland program, which will be allowed to continue through the current school year, is unrelated to the church-state issue. Because Ohio's constitution limits each piece of state legislation to one subject, the court found that the voucher program had been improperly authorized by a rider attached to an omnibus appropriations bill in 1995.

"They got it half right. They struck it down but they didn't do it for the right reasons," said Barry Lynn, executive director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State. "We will now battle this thing in the legislature."

But with Republicans controlling Ohio's legislature, Bolick predicted "the odds are pretty good we'll be able to keep this program going in September."

City Journal, Spring 1999

How Gotham's Elite High Schools Escaped the Leveller's Ax

Stuyvesant, Bronx Science, and Brooklyn Tech are everything the public school system has mistakenly tried to eradicate.

Heather Mac Donald

New York City brags to the world about its excellences—its peerless business expertise, its world-class restaurants, its unparalleled sophistication, its renowned monuments—but about one rare treasure, a set of elite, overachieving public high schools, it remains largely silent. The Bronx High School of Science, Stuyvesant High School, and Brooklyn Technical High School have nurtured nine Nobel laureates, hundreds of Westinghouse Science Talent Search winners, award-winning biologists and astrophysicists, astronauts, inventors, and captains of commerce. The Ivy Leagues clamor for their graduates, virtually all of whom attend college. Their daily attendance rate runs at 95 percent and higher. These schools are everything the rest of the public education system is not: its reverse image, they are the positive to its negative.

Why, then, hasn't success-crazed New York trumpeted these schools with as much fanfare as it expends on the Yankees or the New York Stock Exchange? Simple: they embody one of the most odious concepts in contemporary education—elitism. Because they have preserved, by a lucky historical fluke, a century-old admissions system based solely on merit, they are a horrible embarrassment to New York's educational and public-sector establishment, wedded as it is to the philosophy of the lowest common denominator.

Left to its own devices, that establishment would long since have subjected the three exam

An anxious New York ritual: waiting for the entrance exam at Stuyvesant.

schools to the same leveling forces by which it has ground down the rest of the education system. Instead, it is forced to erode them more slowly, by mindless bureaucratic regulation and the irritating friction of teachers' union rules. The recent history of the exam schools—the bitter battles fought to preserve their excellence—perfectly mirrors the decline of educational elitism in New York, to the great detriment of its entire civic culture.

During the nineteenth century, elite high schools, many modeled on the colonial-era Boston Latin School, sprang up across the nation. As part of this movement, within the first three decades of the twentieth century, New York created Stuyvesant on Manhattan's Lower East Side, Brooklyn Tech in Fort Greene, Townsend Harris Hall on the campus of the City College of New York, and Bronx Science in the northwest Bronx—all to provide unlimited educational opportunity to any New York pupil qualified to take advantage of it, including the most talented children of the city's multitudinous new immigrants.

These new schools were intensely disciplined and highly selective, with admission based on a written exam of math and reading skills. Townsend Harris, the most elite of all, and the only one not focused on math and science, condensed four years of high school into three, after which its students automatically gained admission to City College. The workload was huge. Author and journalist Dan Seligman, a 1941 Townsend Harris grad, recalls having to get up at midnight to work on his homework till 4 AM. "Adding to my despair," he has written, "was an observation that some of the adjacent geniuses seemed to be racing through their homework during the lunch hour." The workload at the schools today is not much lighter. At Stuyvesant, the saying goes that you can choose any two of the following three items: grades, friends, or sleep.

The curriculum was inflexible: students at the science schools took math and science every year. Psychoanalyst Yale Kramer, a 1947 graduate of Brooklyn Tech, says of the rigid requirements, "You went to Brooklyn Tech and didn't ask questions." The intense focus quickly paid off—one of the boys in Bronx Science's first graduating class in 1941, Roy Glauber, went directly to work on the Manhattan Project, without an intervening spell at college. Within its first 12 years, Bronx Science would graduate four of its five Nobel prizewinners; by 1993, it had produced 50 percent more Westinghouse Science Talent Search winners than any other school in the country.

Then, as now, the students made the schools. Specialized facilities were nice, where they existed, but not essential; Stuyvesant achieved wonders in a wreck of a building for decades before it moved to its sumptuous new $150 million Battery Park City facility in 1992. But the students were a constant, and they created an environment of high competition and high achievement, spurring one another on with their intellectual enthusiasms and adolescent one-upmanship. Explaining Stuyvesant's present exalted status as an achievement hothouse, principal Jinx Cozzi-Perullo refuses to take credit: "This is not a model we create," she contends. "The kids come in with a need to excel."

This concentration of talent has always unsettled more than a few outsize egos. "I was used to thinking of myself as superior," recalls Seligman with amusement, "but at Townsend Harris, I was just average." That remains the effect of the schools today. Says Milton Kopelman, principal of Bronx Science from 1977 to 1990: "Students come in as big shots, only to realize that they're not the smartest kids in the world. It has a humbling effect."

For their first half-century, these New York schools epitomized American meritocracy. Gene Lichtenstein, a 1948 Bronx Science graduate, told the *New York Times Magazine* in 1978: "It seems naive today, but Science was perceived then by parents and teachers as the embodiment of the American Dream, meritocracy at work. . . . For those accepted, the future could be open and unlimited, despite income and family origins. It was all dependent on performance." The key phrase here is: "It seems naive today. . . ." Between 1948 and 1978, the world around Bronx Science and the other exam schools changed utterly. In 1948, young Lichtenstein did not have to apologize for the view that a selection system based purely on ability was a supreme social advance over class, race, or reli-

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gious privilege. When that meritocratic system proved to select some groups in higher numbers than others, however, its former proponents, including Lichtenstein and many other members of the country's elites, grew uneasy.

In a possible early harbinger of official discomfort with intellectual elitism, Mayor Fiorello La Guardia declared his intention in 1941 to shut down Townsend Harris Hall. La Guardia cited budgetary pressures and the need for space to house a new City College business school, now Baruch College. Parents and teachers waged a fierce legal fight to preserve the school. Among their allies was the *New York Times*, which had not yet decided that merit was a code word for bias. The *Times*'s arguments recall a remarkably different world. The paper lauded the school's "rigid entrance requirements" for creating a "homogeneous group of able students." The "most widely admitted defect in our school system," the *Times* pronounced, "is that the highly gifted are frequently held back by the dullards. Townsend Harris is the one high school where this obstacle is not permitted to arise." Such arguments, however, did not carry the day, and in 1942, the Board of Higher Education closed the school. (In 1984, alumni resurrected Townsend Harris on the Queens College campus with a looser admissions policy, but it remains an excellent school.)

"One of the boys in Bronx Science's first graduating class went directly to work on the Manhattan Project."

It wasn't until the 1960s—a time when the ideal of equality of opportunity gave way to demands for equality of results—that a sustained assault on educational meritocracy began in earnest. The first sally came during the 1968 Ocean Hill–Brownsville disturbances, in which black activists demanded "community control" over schools, sparking the bitterest teachers' strike in the city's history. Among the activists' many demands was the conversion of the three science schools to community schools, open to all. That demand failed, but it had an impact. The schools agreed to expand a newly created affirmative-action program, called Discovery, for students who scored below the cut-off point on the entrance exam, despite worries among some faculty that the modest program was bringing in too many unprepared students.

Less than three years later, in January 1971, a direct challenge rocked the exam schools. The superintendent of Community School Board Three on Manhattan's West Side, Alfredo Mathew, charged that the admissions test at the Bronx High School of Science, then the most academically selective school in the country, was "culturally biased"—a dubious allegation—and worked to "screen out" black and Puerto Rican students. Mathew's board demanded that the schools chancellor abolish the admissions test and admit students solely on the basis of recommendations; it threatened a lawsuit if he didn't.

Though the principal of Bronx Science, Alexander Taffel, properly defended the entrance tests as both culturally neutral and essential to the school's mission, schools chancellor Harvey B. Scribner was far less certain of the school's good faith and freedom from bias. To the horror of Bronx Science supporters everywhere, two days after Mathew's demand, Scribner appointed a commission to study the admissions tests at all the selective schools, explaining darkly: "I have discovered enough to raise serious questions." Showing that he was a man of the times who had moved beyond an easy naïveté about merit, he announced that "any test of academic achievement tends to be culturally biased."

Scribner's apparent acquiescence in the attack produced a wave of fear among the schools' supporters. When admissions notices for that year were delayed, rumors flew that Scribner was manipulating the process in order to produce a more acceptable racial mix of students. Bronx Science's faculty, parents, alumni, and friends

formed a council to save the school from destruction. They got the attention of two Bronx state legislators, Senator John Calandra and Assemblyman Burton Hecht. Hecht and Calandra accused the schools chancellor of "the most insidious attack thus far upon the finest educational school in New York City." Scribner's attempt to "destroy these schools must be stopped immediately," they proclaimed.

The two legislators introduced a bill to enshrine in law the admissions test. Lining up against the bill were, predictably, the Board of Education, the State Regents, Mayor Lindsay's administration, and, now, the *New York Times*, which had recently shed its elitist principles. In an about-face from its stand in the Townsend Harris controversy, the newly egalitarian *Times* accused the Assembly of "petrifying" the high schools and announced that nothing should be "sacrosanct" about the exam schools. Whereas the Townsend Harris–era *Times* had lauded selective admissions, the 1970s *Times*, speaking through education reporter Fred Hechinger, trivialized selectivity in admissions as an easy way for schools and colleges to look good. Turning the usual argument against admissions tests on its head, Hechinger claimed that they were *too* good at predicting success, thus giving schools and colleges a too easily educable group of students.

The *Times*'s scorn had little effect on the state legislators, however. After passionate debate in the Assembly, both legislative houses passed the bill, in May 1971. Though the Hecht-Calandra bill seemed to have given the exam schools lasting protection against New York's strengthening levelling tendencies, their students took nothing for granted. Matthew Bram, a 1974 Stuyvesant grad and now a software developer in New York, recalls that throughout his four years at Stuyvesant, the "concept loomed over us—the city will yank the school out. We were terrified." For Bram, losing Stuyvesant would have meant going to Brandeis High School on Manhattan's Upper West Side, known variously as "the Drugstore" and "the Gauntlet," he recalls. "I would've dropped out of high school rather than go," he says.

An international bridge-building contest at Bronx Science.

Bram remembers disparaging comments about Stuyvesant as the "free prep school for Jews" and a "privileged little ivory tower." He rejects the charge of privilege. The typical neighborhood high school had far better facilities than Stuyvesant's decaying building on East 15th Street, he recalls. "Chalk and blackboards were our only facility," Bram maintains. "The only thing Stuyvesant offered us was a wall to protect us from the rest of what the city offered in high school." Within that wall, students flourished. "We were only there to learn; it was a joy," Bram says. "We would stop each other in the halls to argue about astrophysics and existentialism."

After having been foiled by the Hecht-Calandra bill of 1971, New York's official animus against anything smacking of "elitism" grew stronger and more implacable, largely for reasons of racial politics. Gotham was far from unique in this respect: in 1975, a federal judge imposed racial quotas on the legendarily demanding Boston Latin School, causing standards—in the opinion of some faculty—eventually to loosen, and in 1983 another federal judge, after finding San Francisco's Lowell High School too Asian, saddled it with a Rube Goldberg set of race-based ceilings on admissions. New York fortunately managed to stay out of the clutches of the courts, but in 1986 its Board of Ed turned against a set of eight mildly selective and very popular high schools. These so-called educational-option schools chose 25 percent of their students from eighth-graders reading above grade level, 50 percent from those of average ability, and 25 percent from children reading below grade level—not exactly an exclusive formula. But to the Board of Ed and other loud levellers in the city, 25 percent of above-average students was far too many. The schools' fatal error? They were succeeding. Explained Margaret Nuzum, head of the Educational Priorities Panel, an influential watchdog group, the option schools have "an aura of being selective. . . . There is a sense that this is a better school to be in."

Weighing in on the controversy, then-Manhattan borough president David Dinkins succinctly expressed the levellers' philosophy in a letter to the *New York Times*. Those who say, " 'Don't change our schools, make the others better,' " he wrote, "fail to see that the two systems are inextricably linked; each exists, in part, because of the other." This fatal zero-sum logic has been utterly destructive for cities, including New York. If a school or business excels, it raises the sum total of a culture's assets. Zero-summers, however, see accomplishment as a sign of unfair advantage that necessarily rests upon the exploitation or oppression of others. In this view, the only just society is one of uniform mediocrity, for as soon as someone excels, someone else by definition has been harmed. Zero-summing in education means that the only way to improve the low-achieving schools is to pull down the high-achievers, an agenda inimical to the middle class.

Ultimately, the Board of Education purged the educational-option schools of any possible taint of "elitism" by narrowing the top and bottom bands of students and requiring half of all admittees to be selected at random. Thereafter, it would be nearly impossible for a school, other than the exam schools, to select for academic talent. From now on, students who had never bothered to do their homework would have the greatest chance of admission to some of the city's most popular schools, since far fewer low-achieving than high-achieving students apply to them. The *Washington Post*'s Jonathan Yardley astutely identified the implicit message of the Board's latest levelling action: in a predominantly minority school system, lower standards are "fairer" standards. "We assume that the only way to make schools genuinely democratic," Yardley wrote in disgust, "is to make them genuinely inferior."

Since 1986, the Board has stayed its lowest-common-denominator course. When the federal Education Department's Office of Civil Rights announced an investigation of the city's grade-school gifted and talented programs last year, it got no protest from city education bureaucrats, who have been chipping away at the gifted programs for years. The Board of Ed's head of high schools explained the Board's philosophy to *New York* magazine last year. If schools are to improve, said Margaret Harrington, "you don't talk about your best and brightest, you talk about your bottom. . . . As you raise your bottom, everyone goes up. . . . We believe that all children should have

access to every program and that every school should educate all children." Judith Tarlo, director of high-school support services, is more blunt: "We are about access and sharing the wealth"—not primarily academic excellence.

Now, decades of research by the anti-tracking lobby have failed to prove Harrington's claim that focusing on the bottom makes everyone go up, and simple logic suggests otherwise. Moreover, it is absurd to maintain that by high school every child can benefit from, say, the advanced college physics offered by the science high schools. Following this determined egalitarianism to its logical conclusion would turn New York into another Detroit or Philadelphia, from which the middle class of all races has largely bailed out.

Despite the Board's militant anti-elitism, some at the city's selective science schools feel blissfully sheltered by the Hecht-Calandra bill. "You can take us to court, you can yell and scream—given the bill, you can't do anything!" gleefully rasps Stan Teitel, the chairman of Stuyvesant's physics and chemistry department. Teitel is one of the school's most unapologetic meritocrats. "I don't care if your mommy or daddy knows the superintendent of the borough," he exclaims. "I don't want to know anything else—no portfolios, not any of the other crap—all I want to know is what's upstairs. If you've got it, I will work with it."

But Teitel's confidence regarding Stuyvesant's protected status may be misplaced. Board of Ed bureaucrat Margaret Harrington's credo that "every school should educate all children" is a direct challenge, whether intentional or not, to the three science exam schools. Yes, the Hecht-Calandra law is a major roadblock to the Board's interference, but that does not mean the bureaucracy has given up. "We're always thinking about [the admissions policy]," says the Board's Judith Tarlo.

The Board's school-funding formulas reflect its determination to treat excellence and failure alike—at best. The state distributes its education money to city school administrations based on attendance rates, but in turn New York City distributes those dollars to individual schools based on their enrollment—and these two numbers can differ dramatically. Schools with high attendance figures—all of the selective schools and some others—bring extra money into the system that they don't get back. "If a school generates a lot of revenue because of increased attendance," explains Neil Harwayne, the Board's director of finance, "it still gets the same amount of money [as a school with huge truancy problems]. Otherwise, you would have greater funding in desirable school districts." Nothing wrong with that, you might say; but in fact the selective schools get a lot less funding than other schools, since they rarely qualify for the federal special-education money and remediation money that pours into failing schools, along with dollars for dropout prevention, anti-teen pregnancy, and anti-gang programs. The selective schools used to receive additional funding based on the high number of courses their students take each day, but the Board eliminated that "elitist" formula over a decade ago.

"We assume that the only way to make schools genuinely democratic is to make them genuinely inferior."

It is a gauge of how deep the hostility runs in New York toward pure meritocracy that even some administrators within the selective schools are ambivalent about them. Steven Shapiro, chairman of the Stuyvesant English department, puts his head back and thinks long and hard before replying to the question of whether he would create Stuyvesant again. "I really don't know," he says slowly. "My heart lies with the poor kids of the city; you can't skim all the kids off. I don't like skimming at all." Shapiro concedes that some kids can accomplish "great things when you put them in a place where they have great mentoring" (though it is not the "mentoring" but the concentration of bright kids that makes the exam schools work), but his support seems anguished.

Nor do the selective schools' administrators generally support the creation of more such schools. Though sheer historical accident has given New York three selective science high schools, rather than four or two or five, the principals seem to have concluded, like Goldilocks, that three is just the right number. "It's a difficult question whether to carve out more schools," says Bronx Science principal Stanley Blumenstein. "If you dilute the pool too much by taking kids who are not truly gifted, you change the makeup of every classroom and hurt education as a whole." Then why not dismantle the existing schools? Well, their students are different. "For kids at the upper end, their needs are not met by general schools."

Blumenstein is making a classic "anti-creaming" argument. Every school needs academically excited children to motivate the others, the argument goes, so the smartest shouldn't be skimmed off and put in separate schools. But surely it is the teacher's responsibility, not the students', to inspire the laggards. If an academically motivated student would reach his fullest potential in an environment of his peers, it is educational exploitation to deny him that environment in the hope that he will kindle the interest of academically uninspired students.

Certainly, thousands of New York families—and ex–New York families—subscribe to that sentiment. Every year, approximately 21,000 students take the entrance exam for approximately 2,500 entering seats in the science schools. The desperation on their parents' faces as they await their children after the exam is a New York legend. The science schools represent tiny islands of achievement in a vast sea of mediocrity or worse. But because the demand for a decent education is so great, the schools have started attracting more and more students without any particular interest in science, thus watering down their mission.

Demand not only at the exam schools but at every school with a reputation for excellence is overwhelming. Other high-achieving schools, such as Townsend Harris in Queens and Midwood High School in Brooklyn, receive applica-

Stuyvesant's new $150 million home

tions in numbers many magnitudes higher than they have seats. Many parents don't wait around long enough to see if their children will get a coveted place. According to Manhattan city councilman Gifford Miller, young parents in his district regularly leave the city, fearful of the mediocrity that awaits their children in high school. These striving families take their tax dollars as well as their children with them, shrinking the city's middle class.

But the Board of Ed is remarkably blasé about losing children to the suburbs. "It's not that easy to leave the city by the time your kids are high-school age," asserts Dorothy Kuritzkes, executive assistant to Margaret Harrington. True—but nothing prevents them from leaving earlier. Kuritzkes agrees that high-achieving students can motivate one another but does not see it as the public schools' mission to make that happen: "The private schools can do that," she says breezily.

The only unequivocal group of meritocrats left in the selective schools are the students themselves. When asked about protests against the schools waged annually by Acorn, a left-wing community-organizing group, the students are almost uniformly dismissive. "I can't understand how you could make a test fair to certain races," scoffs Vivian Chau, a Stuyvesant senior and vice president of Arista, the school's honors and public-service society. "The Acorn protest was so silly, because our school has a majority minority population—in most books, being an Asian is a minority." Stuyvesant senior Danielle Stewart recalls that students were yelling at Acorn, "Go back to your own schools!" "It was *so* annoying," she says, "because we were taking the AP [Advanced Placement] tests. I was, like, how *dare* you come into our school? Even the black kids were, like, '*I* got in; what's *your* problem?' "

But though the science schools have largely withstood the levelling onslaughts against them, they are succumbing to other pathologies in the school system—above all, to crippling teachers' union rules. The union's powerful grip on secondary education has only strengthened in recent years. "The union protects bad teachers, not good ones," sighs Steven Shapiro. Exam-school parents almost universally complain about poor teacher quality, about which most have grown fatalistic. "Some of the teachers were so bad, we were amazed that they have any job," says Tory Brand, mother of a Stuyvesant junior. "I thought Stuyvesant would have had the power to weed them out. Once I got over that, it helped a lot."

The litany of parents' and students' complaints will be familiar to anyone with even the faintest knowledge of the public schools: teachers who fall asleep during class, teachers who don't show or always come late, teachers who spend the period talking about their family, teachers who never cover the material. "In some classes, I had to teach myself everything," recalls Stuyvesant senior Danielle Stewart, who has a 97 average. Principals and department chairs know who the burned-out, incompetent teachers are just as much as parents and students do. When I asked to sit in on the class of a Stuyvesant history teacher whom parents view as a madwoman, Shapiro shot back: "That's not a good idea; that's not somewhere you should go." The students, of course, have no choice.

Administrators face the standard public-school dilemma: they can spend all their time compiling the lengthy record needed to try to lift the tenure protection of one rotten teacher, or they can use their energies to groom more promising new teachers. "It's a difficult position to be in; you do what you can," reflects Stuyvesant's Stan Teitel.

Frustration with the union straitjacket recently led Stuyvesant's principal Cozzi-Perullo to announce her resignation, just four years after she took over the most coveted principal's job in the city. "To change the schools in New York," she says bluntly, "you need the power of only two things: the ability to hire and fire at will, and the money to reduce class size." Her parting should sound an alarm throughout the city, and at least one additional fed-up principal of one of the city's better high schools predicts that he will follow her.

Another threat to the exam schools is the growing influence of progressive pedagogy. The three schools have become schizophrenic—most science and math classes provide a journey back 40 years, where, *mirabile dictu*, the teacher still teaches; but

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the humanities are fast junking such traditional practices for the babel of "student-centered learning." In many advanced physics and calculus classes, an almost audible silence surrounds the teacher's words: it is the sound of students thinking very hard. Even where a student presents a lesson, as in a class on molecular genetics that I visited at Stuyvesant, the teacher actively directs the questioning and conveys hard information.

Yet that may be changing. All the schools are trying to reduce lecturing in math and the sciences in favor of "inquiry-based"—that is, student-centered—group learning. Their model: classes like Steven Shapiro's highly popular twentieth-century literature course, "Crisis in Values." One student begins talking; he then calls on the next, who calls on the next, and so on. Except for occasional brief interventions, the teacher stands silent. But however clever Stuyvesant students may be, they lack the knowledge to move a discussion, say, about whether young late-nineteenth-century Britons worked less or more than young Americans today and were less emotionally mature—nominally drawn from D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*—beyond mere ungrounded speculation. Surely a teacher possesses knowledge about literature and its context that he could usefully transmit to students. But such a view violates fundamental progressive beliefs about the "constructed" rather than received nature of knowledge. As one enthusiastic young English teacher at Bronx Science, a recent graduate of Columbia Teachers College, explained: "The students are not here to get it from me; they're so bright, it's a sin not to have them teach each other. I'm here to facilitate, not feed them."

Student-centered learning is not what alumni of the science schools mean when they say that they taught one another. They may have spurred one another on and shared what knowledge they had; they were not literally in charge of the intellectual content of a classroom.

"Some of the teachers were so bad, we were amazed that they have any job, says the mother of a Stuyvesant junior."

Consistent with progressive dictates, the science schools don't give their students rigorous instruction in grammar—which the kids crave and, according to parents and some teachers, desperately need. Even principals acknowledge the problem: "Kids are coming out of elementary school less prepared in writing," says Stanley Blumenstein, with considerable understatement. "It's the endemic problem of the nineties." But don't count on the schools offering them formal grammar instruction any time soon. "Research in the field of English language arts," Blumenstein insists, "shows that it is more effective to learn grammar in the context of a lesson, in an ad hoc manner." Well, the results speak for themselves—the less grammar is taught, the worse student writing becomes.

Despite their shortcomings, the exam schools continue a tradition of excellence. Rather than merely tolerating their existence, the city should ensure that they live up to their potential by giving them control over their staff—a reform every New York school deserves. And New York should create more schools for high-achieving students. The new state charter-school law foolishly prohibits charter schools from selecting their students, a limitation that reflects, once again, the educational and political establishment's terror of anything that violates egalitarianism.

New York exists, however, to be a stage for the world's greatest musicians, actors, financiers, chefs, and designers—why not also for the greatest students? "Come to New York and win an Intel Science Talent Search scholarship," ads aimed at persuading out-of-staters to move to the city could read. Intellectual elitism was for decades a source of pride in New York; once that ideal became a target of resentment, the city lost one of its most powerful economic and cultural engines. ■

Research for this article was supported by the Brunie Fund for New York Journalism.

The Economist, March 27, 1999

Education

Class peace

"EXCELLENCE in Cities" was not much of a title for the government's new policy on inner-city education, published on March 24th. "Something for Everyone" or "In Place of Selection", might have been nearer the mark.

The government says it is against allowing schools to select children by academic aptitude. Indeed it is promoting local ballots, which will allow parents to abolish the few remaining selective grammar schools, and it has scrapped the Tories' "Assisted Places" scheme, which gave poor children scholarships at fee-paying schools.

But this leaves a dilemma. Even the prime minister has said that he understands that parents could have reservations about sending their children to inner-city comprehensives—as well he might, in view of the arrangements he has made for his own children. So as a sop to those who think that these schools often fail gifted children, the government is promoting a variety of experiments. Not selection, you understand, never that. Most schools will still have to take all comers—but they will then be able to pick out particularly gifted children and put them in a hot-house.

One idea is to arrange summer schools for able children in poor areas. In Harlesden, a London borough, standards leapt after places were awarded for a summer school for the best pupils; it was held at Britain's poshest school, Eton. Ministers want more choice for able pupils—for example, all should have the chance to study a range of languages. They want more specialist schools; more computers; extra tuition outside school hours; and teaching in sets rather than mixed-ability classes.

Allowing selection within mixed-ability schools is what used to be called a cop-out, and is now known as the third way. As often happens with compromises, it is liable to antagonise true believers at both ends of the spectrum. Left-wing teaching unions were swift to denounce the return of selection by the back door. And supporters of the old grammar-school system argue that the new scheme is likely to fail both to draw middle-class parents back into the state system—which is apparently one of its aims—and to deliver all the intended benefits to poorer children. The point, they say, is to create schools whose entire ethos is disciplined and academic, not just to bolt extra lessons on to inadequate institutions.

Although the focus of newspaper headlines was on measures for able children, there was also something for those who worry about standards for the bulk of ordinary students, who might suffer if they are in weak schools or badly run areas. This month, David Blunkett, the education secretary, took schooling in Hackney, a London borough, out of the hands of the local authority. Parts of its education system will be put out to tender. In a neat manoeuvre, the government got the authority to agree to the takeover by giving Hackney's new star director of education, Elizabeth Reid, a big role in the arrangement.

However, no one is betting on a similar compromise being found in the next two likely candidates for takeover, Liverpool and Islington. Both are notoriously weak—which is why, when Mr Blair lived in Islington, he sent his children elsewhere. Both authorities are currently being visited by education inspectors. Both might resist takeover, even challenging it in the courts. Both are likely to find the government adamant.

There was also something for the dullest and most troublesome pupils. "Learning mentors" are to be assigned to struggling pupils, giving them extra attention. Disruption will be tackled by giving each school access to a special unit, to which children can be referred.

A separate announcement on March 25th means that more might also be done for past school failures. Sir Claus Moser presented a report commissioned by the government on adult literacy. His gruesome conclusion was that 23% of adults had a literacy problem; they were unable to find the page reference for plumbers in a telephone directory. The figure in Germany is 12%. In Europe only Poland and Ireland scored worse than Britain.

Further-education colleges are where illiterate people have traditionally been helped, but Sir Claus points out that people who have failed at school may not fancy going back to a school-type environment. A new style is encouraged, with, for example, programmes in shopping malls. The government is already running clinics named after "Brookside", a TV soap opera, which features an illiterate.

The government wants to promote all its measures as moderate good sense—"free of dogma", in the words of Mr Blunkett. He will have been encouraged that his statement on inner-city education was welcomed both by the left-wing Labour MPs, Diane Abbott and Bernie Grant, and the right-wing Tory, Sir Teddy Taylor. Yet Mr Blunkett, before the election, promised that Labour would never allow selective education. In those days, you see, dogma was all right, so long as it was good dogma.

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Selected Readings on School Reform

Standards, Tests, and Accountability

The standards movement, which spread like wildfire through the states in the 1990s, may face a setback in Ohio. After thousands of students failed the 4th grade reading test, lawmakers, prodded by representatives of various education organizations and parents of failed students, are considering lowering the score that children must attain in order to be promoted to 5th grade. Writing in the *Cincinnati Enquirer*, Michael Hawthorne reports on the irony of creating standards to prevent teachers and school officials from making excuses for failing students, only to then lower the bar.

We found a more encouraging story in *The Washington Post*. Amy Argetsinger writes about "Beating Poverty in the Classroom." Interestingly, principals in successful schools say, "the success of their schools has little to do with panaceas so often touted by politicians, like smaller classes and technology." They say that the answer has more to do with teamwork, coordination and parental involvement. We found another success story farther south. Kathleen Vail, in an *American School Board Journal* article, "Mississippi Rising," documents the Oxford school board's and superintendent's aggressive approach to raising reading scores.

Patrick Welsh, veteran high school English teacher in Alexandria, Virginia, recently noted a sea change. *The Washington Post* title for Welsh's essay sums up his finding: "It's No Longer Uncool to Do Well in School." Though the black-white test score gap is still wide, Welsh notes that it's started to close and, from his 25 years of teaching, he's observed a dramatic change in students', particularly black students', attitudes about school work.

Next, Penn State's football coach takes his argument for high standards to the pages of the *Wall Street Journal*. Although a federal judge repealed the NCAA's minimum test-score requirement (820 out of 1600 on the SATs), calling it a civil rights violation, Joe Paterno pledges to maintain that requirement for his team. He argues that the rule puts pressure on athletically talented youth to make academics a top priority.

Speaking of tests, Jay Mathews has found a few "True Tests," which he writes about in *The Washington Post Magazine*. Mathews, having subjected himself to the International Baccalaureate history examinations, comes back singing the IB's praises: the program requires memory, synthesis, and depth of thought. Maybe more exposure to IB classes would keep high school seniors interested. June Kronholz, in her *Wall Street Journal* article "Why Has Senior Year of High School Lost Its Purpose for Many?," looks at the effect of early college decisions and 11th grade exit exams. Having their future settled by October of their senior year, students prefer to focus on outside work and play; others, who feel unchallenged academically, take AP courses or sign up at local colleges. All this is prompting schools to rethink senior year. Maybe they should rethink the rest of high school, too.

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Cincinnati Enquirer, May 28, 1999

Ohio Lowering Reading Standards

By MICHAEL HAWTHORNE
Cincinnati Enquirer

Faced with the prospect of holding back thousands of fourth-graders for flunking a statewide reading test, Ohio is moving to lower the score required to advance.

The proposed changes come less than two years after the General Assembly enacted tough academic standards, including a highly touted guarantee that all children will read at grade level when they leave the fourth grade.

Children in first grade this year will be the first required to pass the reading test. More than half of last year's fourth-graders failed the exam.

Students passed if they met a "proficient" standard. Under the revised system, there would be three possible outcomes: passing the test at an advanced level; meeting the current proficient score; and simply passing.

Susan Tave Zelman, Ohio's superintendent of public instruction, said Thursday the changes won't "dumb down" the reading test. Yet Dr. Zelman also said the new passing score - still to be determined - would allow some children to advance even though they need "continuing intervention services as they go on to the fifth grade."

"We all know that a child who can't read can't learn," Dr. Zelman said. " But (the changes) won't weaken our commitment to fix reading problems early so every child has the building blocks needed to succeed throughout his or her life."

If the passing score isn't changed and kids don't start to post higher scores, more than 65,000 students a year could eventually be forced to repeat the fourth grade.

Superintendents across the state have loudly complained they would be left with a logistical nightmare, trying to find room for kids held back alongside those who have moved up from third grade.

"The idea of retaining children by a test is a drastic measure," said John Brandt of the Ohio School Boards Association.

Lawmakers and education officials denied the scoring changes are motivated by the slew of fourth-graders failing the test.

Unlike the state's ninth-grade proficiency test, which students must pass before graduating from high school, the fourth-grade test wasn't designed to determine which kids should be held back, said Sen. Eugene Watts, R-Dublin.

State education officials sought to identify potential learning problems by using a higher standard for the fourth-grade test. But that doesn't necessarily mean students who fail the test can't succeed in fifth grade, Mr. Watts said.

The 1997 academic reform law sponsored by Mr. Watts ordered the state Department of Education to conduct a study to validate the reading standards. The study, to be completed this fall, is needed to defend the standards from potential lawsuits, Mr. Watts said.

"We are not lowering our standards," he said. "We are strengthening them."

Gov. Bob Taft has repeatedly cited dismal scores on the fourth-grade reading test when promoting his OhioReads program, a $ 30-million-a-year initiative to boost reading scores with volunteer tutors and literacy grants.

Scott Milburn, Mr. Taft's spokesman, said the governor hasn't been briefed on the proposed scoring changes and doesn't have a position on them.

"The governor is in favor of high standards," Mr. Milburn said. "All signs indicate this is a time when students need to demonstrate reading proficiency to succeed later in life."

Representatives of several education groups appeared beside Mr. Watts and Dr. Zelman at a Statehouse press conference to defend the proposed changes. But they disagreed with the senator's notion that changing the passing score won't lower the standard set by lawmakers.

Michael Billirakis, president of the Ohio Education Association, the state's largest teachers' union, said the state hasn't done enough to train teachers and support schools.

"They obviously are lowering the standard," Mr. Billirakis said. "But that's OK. Kids shouldn't be punished for the failure of adults to make the right decisions at the right time."

More research is needed to determine when students should be held back, said Gary Wooddell, assistant superintendent of the Oak Hills Local Schools in Hamilton County.

"The fourth-grade test was designed as a sort of early-warning system for the high-stakes ninth-grade test," Mr. Wooddell said. "Using the fourth-grade test to determine retention is a pretty serious decision about a child's career. But the state hasn't done anything to back up the current standard."

Ironically, the current standard will continue to be used on report cards measuring how schools perform on standardized tests. Districts with the lowest report card scores could face various forms of intervention, including a state takeover.

The Washington Post, May 16, 1999

Beating Poverty In the Classroom

Some Schools See Ways To Do Well on Md. Tests

By Amy Argetsinger
Washington Post Staff Writer

The stark statistics Maryland officials unfurl every year in the form of school "report cards" fail to convey how much progress some educators are making with underprivileged children, a Washington Post analysis of test scores has found.

The Post's comparison of schools with similarly poor student populations shows that some are having a greater impact than their raw test scores indicate, offering clues to educators about where they may find solutions to the challenges of poverty.

Studies have shown that a high percentage of poor students is the single biggest drag on a school's performance. Indeed, most Maryland schools with impoverished student bodies produce mediocre or poor scores on the state's standardized tests.

But the Post analysis of the 1997 and 1998 Maryland School Performance Assessment Program's fifth-grade exams reveals that some schools with large concentrations of poor students actually have made remarkable progress, all but unheralded.

The study underscores the tremendous disadvantages faced by educators in low-income neighborhoods as they try to reach the ambitious high standards Maryland officials have set for all schools. But it also highlights the capacity of disadvantaged schools to beat the odds and make a difference in the lives of their students.

"Schools matter most for low-income kids"—more so than for any other economic class, and both for better and for worse, said Willis Hawley, who oversaw a similar study of Maryland school test scores by University of Maryland researchers.

The Post study mirrors other such studies conducted by state and local officials—but never made public—that attempt to figure out what makes even the poorest schools thrive and what lessons they might hold for others.

The answers may be surprising. Principals say the success of their schools has little to do with the panaceas so often touted by politicians, like smaller classes and technology. Instead, they cite much subtler factors—teamwork, coordination, parental involvement.

"Those schools have a more difficult job, there's no doubt," said Mark Moody, an assistant superintendent of the Maryland State Department of Education, which has performed similar studies. "But it doesn't take enormous amounts of money or heroic efforts—just focused, hard work."

Gladys Orton, principal of a District Heights school in Prince George's County that regularly outscores many schools in far wealthier suburban enclaves, agrees.

"It might sound like a cliche," said the head of Berkshire Elementary, "but we work hard on developing a can-do attitude."

To some, Maryland's high-pressure testing system, with its implicit threat to the careers of educators at low-scoring schools, seems inherently unfair. Schools that do well on the MSPAP exams are rewarded with cash bonuses and certificates; those that do poorly are marked for staff overhauls or even potential takeover by state officials.

Instead of measuring how schools compare with a state or national norm, the MSPAP pushes schools toward a high and absolute standard. The goal, announced nearly a decade ago, was that 70 percent of children should be earning "satisfactory" scores.

But so far, only 80 of the state's 1,029 elementary and middle schools have hit that mark—mostly schools in affluent neighborhoods with few low-income students.

Meanwhile, those schools languishing at the back of the pack—with barely 10 or 20 percent of their students proving their competency on the exams—are almost invariably those with high rates of poverty. Of the 97 schools placed on a state warning list for potential takeover, 83 are in Baltimore, and 12 are in Prince George's County.

"We have students who come to school who are homeless, who don't know where their parents are, whose parents are in jail, who are surrounded by drug dealing and violence, and we expect them to devote their attention to learning how to read," said Doyle Niemann (Mount Rainier), vice chairman of the Prince George's school board.

Poor students are not necessarily worse pupils, but because of the obstacles they must hurdle, their teachers carry a greater burden than teachers in more affluent schools, Niemann said. "Some might say they would have to do a miraculous job to obtain the same kind of results an average teacher might get with a more privileged group."

Similar concerns have been raised in Virginia, where state officials have required all schools, regardless of their student poverty rate, to reach the same test-score targets by 2007 in order to keep their accreditation.

State officials say they recognize the challenges poor schools face but refuse to set lower expectations for them. All children are entitled to the same, top-notch education, they say, and poverty should not be a barrier to achievement.

"They all have to end up going after the same jobs one day," said Ron Peiffer, spokesman for the

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State Department of Education.

Mary D'Ovidio came to Broad Acres Elementary as principal seven years ago and admits it was "fairly disheartening" to see how it ranked among Montgomery County schools whenever test scores were announced.

"We were always at the bottom," she said.

Though scores have inched up since then, the Silver Spring school still ranks second-to-last in Montgomery and near the bottom fifth in statewide scores.

Yet a different picture emerges when Broad Acres' scores are filtered through the process followed by The Post, known as regression analysis. The technique essentially adjusts schools' performance for income, measuring how one school is doing compared to others in its economic bracket. John C. Larson, the coordinator of research and evaluation for Montgomery County schools, explains it like this:

Imagine the school is a boat paddling upstream. The level of poverty is the current against which the boat must push. Has the boat managed to move faster or slower than other boats battling the same current?

Broad Acres, for one, has gone much faster. Nearly nine out of 10 children come from a poor household. Yet its test scores are significantly higher than those of most schools from equally poor neighborhoods.

D'Ovidio notes that Broad Acres receives some extra funds and staff because of its large number of poor or foreign-speaking students. Yet it doesn't get that much more than its neighbors, and Broad Acres' staffing ratios are unremarkably average, with about 23 or 24 children in a class.

So what's making the difference? D'Ovidio said she has tried to make sure her teachers are all on the same wavelength, focusing on the same goals. Teachers have weekly meetings to align curriculum, so that when students go from one class to the next, or one grade to the next, there is more continuity.

In District Heights, another working-class neighborhood inside the Beltway, Berkshire Elementary also stands out from the pack.

Nearly 80 percent of the children at the school come from poor homes. Yet test scores are only barely below average—more typical of a suburban school with less than half that rate of poverty.

Orton has brought order to her staff. She nails down her new teachers for three-year commitments and thus has avoided the turnover that plagues many troubled schools. Teachers work in teams by subject matter, and children stay with the same group of teachers from fourth through sixth grade.

"You eliminate the loss of time on learning new tasks because kids know the routine already," Orton said. In recent years, Berkshire also has put more emphasis on "hands-on" assignments, like science experiments or map-drawing, that are a cornerstone of the MSPAP exams.

Neither D'Ovidio nor Orton thinks the state's testing system treats them unfairly, even if research shows that their high levels of impoverished children put them at a disadvantage. They note that while their test scores remain far below standard, both of their schools have won state and local citations for making gains. Mark Moody, of the State Department of Education, notes that such awards go to schools even at the very bottom of the pack if they show continuous improvement.

Meanwhile, he said, schools that seem to be resting on their laurels—earning impressively high scores, but not showing improvement—are not rewarded.

In Prince George's County, some officials have complained that the threat of state takeover may unfairly penalize teachers and school systems with a large number of poor children. But the Post analysis pokes holes in that complaint, finding that none of the 12 Prince George's schools on the state's warning list is doing better on state tests than similarly impoverished schools, such as Berkshire Elementary. Many, in fact, are doing somewhat worse than their demographic peers.

Though state officials do not believe in using the results of regression analyses to reward or punish schools, both they and some county officials are using their own research in this field to try to identify practices that help poor schools do better.

It's no easy task, say Orton and D'Ovidio. Orton believes some of Berkshire's success is fortuitous: All of her students live in the same neighborhood. Unlike most public school children, they walk, rather than spend hours on the bus, and share a sense of community.

"I don't say that it would work for someone else," said D'Ovidio of the techniques she has tried at Broad Acres.

"There are so many variables," Orton said.

Staff writer DeNeen Brown and washingtonpost.com database editor Hal Straus contributed to this report.
Detailed test results, including those adjusted for poverty, for Maryland public schools are available at washingtonpost.com/education. County-by-county results will appear in Wednesday's Prince George's Extra and Thursday's Maryland Weekly editions.

The American School Board Journal, May 1999

Mississippi Rising

A school board and superintendent push students to the highest level

BY KATHLEEN VAIL

Mississippi is a land of paradox. The state that has produced the largest number of Pulitzer Prize winning authors for literature also has the highest illiteracy rate in the country—30 percent of its adults can't read. It is a state that takes great pride in its two dominant universities: the University of Mississippi, or Ole Miss, and Mississippi State University. It is a state where the legislature repealed compulsory education laws in the 1950s leaving the public school system in shambles. (The laws weren't restored until 1982.) While educators have been working hard to change Mississippi's anti-intellectual image, public school achievement scores regularly come in at the statistical basement of national comparisons.

One Mississippi school board decided not to accept the status quo. Nearly a decade ago, the Oxford School Board began to take a hard look at the achievements of its students. By most accounts, they were doing an adequate job. But the school board members wanted better for their district. Their focused approach brought results, making Oxford one of the highest-achieving schools in the state. And in the process, the board showed that school boards not only have a role in increasing student achievement, but they also can be leaders in their district's improvement efforts.

Like Mississippi, the Oxford School District is a study in contrasts. The city of Oxford is home to Ole Miss and was the home of William Faulkner, who immortalized the town in his novels, calling it Jefferson. (It was to Jefferson that the Bundrens made their disastrous 40-mile pilgrimage with their mother's corpse in *As I Lay Dying*.) The presence of Ole Miss, and Faulkner's illustrious reputation, has always given the school district a high profile.

"We stay under the microscope," says Oxford School Board President Earl Richard. That was certainly the case in the 1960s, when federal marshals accompanied James Meredith to register for classes at Ole Miss after the university had been forced by federal courts to admit African-Americans for the first time. Meanwhile, the Oxford School District integrated quietly at about the same time. And the district did not suffer white flight: Today the student body of 3,000 is about evenly divided: half black, half white. What's more, says board member Julie Walton, the area saw few so-called segregation academies, private white schools that popped up in the Deep South after integration.

But this was still Mississippi, and education standards lagged. In 1988, the state legislature established a rating system to measure school districts against each other. The scale, which goes from Level 1 to Level 5, is based on 38 benchmarks, mostly achievement scores. Schools ranked Level 1 are on probation and at risk of being taken over by the state; Level 5 schools are considered exceptional. The state is now considering rewarding these schools with monetary stipends for their high-performing teachers.

Oxford was at Level 3, or "successful." But that rating wasn't good enough for the board. Proud of their district's special place in Mississippi history, board members wanted the school to be top rated, to be a Level 5 district. "We were really concerned about how well we were doing," says Richard, who led the improvement initiative.

The board took a look at achievement scores and didn't like what it saw. Math scores were all right, but reading was another matter. "We looked at what was holding us back," says Richard. "The reading scores were too low."

In 1993, while the board was beginning its examination of the district's performance, Oxford's longtime superintendent retired. Enter John Jordan, a mid-level administrator from the school system in Jackson, the state capital. In his job interview, Richard says, the board asked Jordan to bring the district to a Level 5 rating in five years.

"I fully expected the board to challenge me on academic achievement," says Jordan, who took only three years to bring the district's test scores to the highest state standard.

Kathleen Vail is an associate editor of The American School Board Journal.

81 BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Oxford became one of just 12 Mississippi school systems that attained Level 5 status. What makes the achievement more significant is that Oxford is the poorest of the 12 districts, with 45.3 percent of its students eligible for the free and reduced-price federal lunch program.

To move the schools from Level 3 to Level 5, Jordan invited teachers and principals to suggest ideas for improvement. One of the suggestions turned out to be pivotal: To boost scores, the teachers wanted to try Reading Recovery, a structured program for first-graders.

The process of increasing reading scores didn't go in a straight line, however. Tracking children in the Reading Recovery program, Jordan discovered that the program worked until the third grade, when most participants dropped back to their usual level. Something was wrong. The program needed to be modified. "We put out a challenge," says Jordan. "We said, 'Here are the facts: You teachers make a decision and do what's best.'"

At Bramlett Elementary School, which houses pre-K to second grade, the principal and the teachers decided to go in a different direction, keeping elements of Reading Recovery but broadening the program for use with more students.

Meanwhile, Jordan and Karen Tutor, director of federal funds, began exploring changes in the way the district was using federal Title I money. The money had been used to support special programs, but Jordan wanted to reform instructional approaches that affected reading for all students. "It's become incorporated into the way we do business," Jordan says of the federal money that targets schools with a high percentage of economically disadvantaged students. "We've become dependent on it. You can do a lot of great things with federal money."

In Oxford's case, those great things include hiring personnel, providing training for teachers, and acquiring materials. Decisions on how to spend Title I money are made by committees of teachers, administrators, and parents. "Teachers have to have a voice in how the money is spent," says Bramlett Principal Mary Jo Rodgers.

But this decentralization of decision making didn't mean the board gave up its oversight role: "The board asked a lot of questions about what we were using the money for," says Tutor.

Now, the drive to maintain Level 5 accreditation is helping create a focus for the school system. "The biggest thing we did was communicate to the teachers what we were being held accountable for. Before, teachers were not made aware of what was required of them," says Jordan. "The rules of the game have changed."

Bramlett reading teacher P.J. Jones is talking about one of her students, a little boy who started the school year far behind his classmates in reading skills. When he couldn't complete a worksheet that asked him to identify drawings of everyday objects, Jones realized the problem wasn't in his ability but in his background. "I had to show him what a broom was; what a squirrel was," says Jones. And this child wasn't alone. Jones says some of her students come to school never having been read to. Some don't know lions from tigers. Some have never heard of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. Jones realized that

much of her job was telling these students about the world they were missing.

Jones was one of three Reading Recovery teachers at Bramlett who saw that the program had limitations. Developed by New Zealand educator Marie Clay, Reading Recovery is an early intervention program that calls for intensive, one-on-one tutoring of the lowest-achieving first-grade readers. When these students reach the average reading level of the class, they leave the program.

But in Oxford, the teachers found they wanted to have more flexibility about whom they could help; they wanted to bend the rules. The testing the program calls for divides a class of students into six groups, three above average and three below average. Teachers had to work with the lowest group, the sixes, before moving on to the fives and the fours. Often, though, Jones says, the teachers spent a lot of time and energy only to discover that many children in the lowest group were learning disabled or needed to be classified as special education students. As a result, many students who could have truly benefited from the extra help weren't included. "When we got to the students who just need a jump start, it was too late," says Jones.

Initially, the school system paid for three new Reading Recovery teachers who had to be trained in the procedure. Because Reading Recovery calls for intensive tutoring, each teacher could usually work with only a couple of students each semester. "We were concerned about money spent on so few students," says Rodgers. "The consensus was that we needed to look at other options."

So the teachers began modifying the program. They decided to use only one Reading Recovery teacher, Jones, and group her with two teaching assistants. They kept their focus on first-graders, but included some second-graders who needed extra help. They let teachers recommend students to the program on the basis of a number of factors, including emotional difficulties. One boy for example, needed lots of what Jones calls tender loving care: He was so fearful that Jones could not turn out the lights in the classroom when she showed a movie. Jones and her assistants also included students who scored well in reading generally but were weak in certain areas, such as a girl who needed help reading orally.

"We couldn't grab kids like that before," says Jones. This year, Jones and her two assistants work with about 40 students, often in small groups—something they couldn't do with the formal Reading Recovery program in place. Children can move in and out of the program any time they need to.

"Listen, hear, write," Jones tells her students. She uses many different ways to get through to them. She reteaches the alphabet, uses phonics and computers, and tries to appeal to a child's senses: hearing, speaking, and feeling. Jones employs techniques to teach reading kinesthetically, using magnetic letters for spelling or a salt table where children can spell out words and feel the letters with their fingers. Because some of her students have trouble with blends (such as *sh*, *ch*, *wh*, or *th*), Jones brings out plastic tubs filled with small objects: a rubber shark, tiny doll shoes, a plastic whale, a thimble, shells, rubber cheese. The task is to place the object in the tub marked with the correct blend.

When you walk through the halls at Bramlett and at Oxford Elementary School, it's easy to see that teachers put a heavy emphasis on reading and writing. Student writing assignments line the walls at both schools. A February lesson for Bramlett students included drawing an outline of President Lincoln's stovepipe hat and writing on it what items they'd keep in such a hat if they had one. Says Tutor: "We believe writing impacts reading."

In third grade and beyond, when instruction turns from teaching reading as a skill to using reading as a tool, Oxford Elementary has several programs in place to keep students focused on reading. Part of the school's effort to raise achievement is its after-school tutoring program. Students who score below the 40th percentile on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills are "invited," as Tutor puts it, to attend tutoring

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sessions after classes are out. Classroom teachers, paid with Title I funds and money from a number of grants, spend an extra hour with these students four days a week. The district pays for extra buses so the students who don't have any other way of getting home can still participate. "Kids require transportation if you're going to provide services," says Jordan.

The buses "are a budget killer," Tutor admits. "But we want these kids to participate, even if we have to get them home."

An incentive program called Accelerated Reading is another part of the literacy emphasis. Students read books from the library, then take reading comprehension tests on classroom computers or at the school's iMac lab. Books are color-coded and assigned points on the basis of difficulty. If the students score 80 percent or better on the test, they are credited with the points for the book. The points add up to prizes and other honors for the students, including hearing their name read over the intercom when they earn 100 points. The point system spurs students to seek out more difficult books. "The students know what colors mean more points," says Principal Judith Thompson, who transferred to Oxford Elementary from Bramlett, where she was instrumental in getting its reading programs started.

To support the teachers, Jordan and the board established a volunteer program. The most popular of the volunteers are the University of Mississippi athletes, well-known young men and women who show up in team uniforms to read to the students. "It's always a big treat," says Tutor. "Our kids think of them as celebrities."

Oxford is now looking at other factors that might not have an immediate impact on test scores but will affect the literacy of their students in the long run. For example, both Bramlett and Oxford elementary schools now offer parent education. A reading teacher at Oxford conducts training for parents on how to select books and read to their children. The sessions have proved popular: About 60 parents showed up for one class.

The presence of Ole Miss in Oxford—it's the town's largest employer—has created a wide chasm between the educational haves and have-nots, according to board member Walton. There's not much of a middle class in town. Some of the children have tremendous educational advantages in their homes; some do not. "It presents a challenge to satisfy the needs of both groups," she says. "You can't make decisions for the middle."

A new preschool program is designed primarily to meet the needs of the town's less-advantaged families. Two classes of 4-year-olds—30 children in all—are being held at Bramlett this school year. Because of the long waiting list for Head Start, says Tutor, lots of children who needed preschool weren't being served.

At first, not everyone on the board was enthusiastic. Walton, a professor at the Center for Speech and Hearing at Ole Miss, says she spoke at a board retreat on the importance of preschool education as well as the growing scientific evidence of its advantages for at-risk children. Later, when a state grant become available for a preschool startup, the board agreed to give it a try. Walton gave suggestions to staff members on how they might test and select children for the program.

Unfortunately, she says, few parents brought their children to be tested in the first year, so the board opened the program up to all interested families, including those that were not disadvantaged. Walton hopes that as more parents hear about the full-day program, it will grow. "We need to do so much more," says Walton, "if we can."

It's too early to tell whether Oxford's preschool initiative will pay off the way the literacy effort has. But both board and staff are alert to the need to track performance indicators. District-wide improvement isn't just a numbers game, of course—part of raising performance is putting faces with the scores. But an accountability engine runs on data, and Jordan can crunch numbers with the best of them. He has students' test scores on his computer, where he can readily pull up test data and generate various reports and comparisons.

In the past, the available test data didn't allow the board or administrators to track the progress of different groups of students. As it was, they could only compare how this year's fifth-graders, say, compared with last year's fifth-graders. That was no help in identifying problems that individuals and groups of students were having. One key to raising performance levels, the board realized, was to make sure the new superintendent developed a system capable of tracking individual students' progress. Jordan put such a system in place, and the district now has a database of individual test scores going back to 1994. "We identify the children by name, not by class," he says.

The state's benchmark testing starts at the fourth grade, but Oxford tests its second- and third-graders with the Iowa Test of Basic Skills so problems can be ferreted out early. This year's sixth-grade class is the first that can be tracked from second grade on. And results for the class show dramatic improvements. In 1994, 18.6 percent of these children scored in the lowest quarter (answering only from 1 to 24 percent of the test questions correctly). Four years later, only 8.5 percent scored in the lowest quarter. And the number of children who scored in the second quarter (getting from 50 to 75 percent of the questions right) increased by 7.6 percent in four years. The fifth-grade class saw an 18.2 percent increase in the number of students scoring in the first quarter (getting from 75 to 99 percent of the questions right). In fact, all of the grades from third to ninth saw a decrease in the number of students in the two lowest quarters and an increase in the number of students in the two highest quarters.

Now that Oxford has reached its goal of Level 5 status, Jordan and the board agree, the challenge is to keep up the energy and focus on achievement. "It's nice to be recognized, but that's not the end. We could slip again," Walton says. "We can't ever rest." ✣

The Washington Post, March 14, 1999

It's No Longer Uncool to Do Well in School

By PATRICK WELSH

Every year, when the results of standardized tests come back to Alexandria and other school systems in this area, we learn the same grim fact: There is a distinct gap between the scores of black and white students.

Local school officials wring their hands. Community activists excoriate the schools or decry the tests as biased. Superintendents promise that their latest program will turn things around. And we teachers can't help getting defensive: Ultimately, it seems, we will share the blame if things don't improve.

There's no denying the gap. Sit in on any advanced placement or honors English course in my school and then move to a "regular" course and it's right there in front of your eyes. Most students in those predominantly white AP classes can read and interpret a 500-page novel such as William Faulkner's "Light in August." Many kids in the overwhelmingly minority regular classes struggle to read a newspaper article.

But what neither the scores nor a quick classroom tour can reveal are the subtle changes both in black students' attitudes and performance that I have witnessed over the past 25 years of teaching high school. And, like the gap, that trend is borne out by national tests: Over the past two decades, the test scores of black kids have been rising at a faster rate than those of whites. The tests, given by the National Assessment of Educational Progress, show that from 1973 to 1996 the most disadvantaged students have made the greatest gains of any group. In math, between 1970 and 1990, the gap between blacks and whites decreased by almost 50 percent.

It may not be as dramatic as the achievement gap, but evidence of this trend is also on display every day in my classrooms. I see more and more black students in my AP classes—middle-class kids as well as kids from poor backgrounds. Reinforced by a wave of African immigrants (the most determined students I've seen since Koreans poured into the schools in the early '70s), these high achievers are beginning to set the tone for other black kids in the school.

I can't credit the schools—the administrators or the teachers—with this change. And I don't want to exaggerate its effect. But the distinction between achievers and non-achievers is slowly changing, and it's not so easily equated with race. I think that it has something to do with the fact that doing well at school is no longer dismissed so often by black students as "acting white."

In recent years, I've heard fewer and fewer black kids accuse their classmates of being "punks" when they work hard in school. In fact, many students I've talked to recently view the macho, wannabe gangsta culture of the streets as "ghetto"—a put-down black kids use to describe anything from the tacky to the downright ignorant. "People here don't call guys suckers or sellouts if they get good grades. Those who think it's cool not to study are considered fools," says senior Cory Cole, who is waiting to hear from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Senior Ebony Porter, who has applied to the College of William and Mary, agrees: "Most kids I know want to do well . . . they have a sense that they have to go to college and do something with their lives."

It seems to me that the parents I know who were students of mine in the '70s invariably emphasize education to their kids more than their own parents did to them. Take Dorothy Smith and her daughter Naomi. Dorothy was in my class 23 years ago. She was the kind of bright, witty kid you just don't forget. Since neither her mother nor her grandmother finished high school, the big thing for Dorothy was to get a high school diploma. "My sisters and I never had a support base to encourage us to go on," she recalls, "and money was such a big issue we went to work right after high school."

Smith, chairwoman of the disciplinary board at the D.C. jail, is now working on a degree in psychology. Last year, her sister's daughter became the first in the family to go to college right after high school. Naomi, who has been accepted at Old Dominion University and is waiting to hear from Howard and Radford universities, will be the second. "My mother doesn't want me to go through what she did," says Naomi. "She's always on me about school. If it weren't for her, I'd be pregnant or locked up or just sitting home chillin'." Now Naomi and her mom are competing to see which of them gets a college degree first.

Like other students, Naomi also recogniz-

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es what a powerful role friends play—for good or bad—in shaping attitudes about school. She recalls that when she attended George Mason Elementary School, which has kids bused in from one of the poorest sections of Alexandria, she didn't meet many black kids who wanted to work. "But when I transferred to Polk," she says, referring to James K. Polk Elementary School, "I met smart people who weren't white .... Black kids and foreign kids who worked hard. I wanted to keep up with them so I started working .... If I had stayed at George Mason, I would only know hard-core black kids now."

Some students express a lingering sadness about friends who never got motivated to work in school. "With graduation coming around, I've been thinking of all the people I grew up with who never seemed to realize the potential they had ... and neither did their parents. They don't know what's out there so they just settle for the lives they've grown up in," says Nonsom Ofulue, one of the top students in the senior class, whose mother refused to let her watch television for a year after she brought home a C. "Some are pregnant, some are in jail ... most are still sitting in classes languishing to the point that they become proud that they are ignorant."

That attitude dumbfounded Andrew Akindele when he arrived here from Nigeria three years ago: "Back home, it's cool to be smart. The top students are the most popular people in the school. The faculty gives them leadership positions, privileges and power over other students. Many black kids here just aren't interested in school. They think they are going to be rap artists or professional athletes. I couldn't believe it when I first came here."

Getting beyond those distorted values has not been so easy for junior Ben Terry who lives in one of Alexandria's public housing projects. "A lot of people think I'm a thug because I wear my hair in cornrows," says Ben, a guy with movie-star looks who can switch from street jive to standard English in a second. "When I was younger, I was a knucklehead. Then I saw the guys in the neighborhood getting in trouble and [I] started to think about my future. Even the older guys who have messed up and just hang around drinking in the streets started getting on me—telling me I could get out of the projects, that I didn't have to end up like them."

Ben admits having an advantage over other kids in public housing. He came from a home where everyone loved to read. "My three older brothers all were readers. So is my mom. We always had stuff around the house to read," says Ben.

That deficit is all too obvious to Otto Isaac, principal of Alexandria's Cora Kelley Magnet School, who grew up in what he describes as "a hard-core, self-enclosed ghetto" in Vallejo, Calif. "Many of these kids come from dysfunctional families where there is little conversation going on. They are spoken at in four- or five-word phrases, usually commands: 'Go to bed .... Wash those dishes .... Get in the house.' By the time they are in school, their language skills are way behind those of their peers." According to a Children's Defense Fund study, many poor kids come into first grade with half the vocabulary of middle-class kids and having experienced only 25 hours of one-on-one reading.

There aren't any quick fixes. Kids who enter school with those sorts of disadvantages need time to catch up with their middle-class peers. Otherwise, they risk becoming the barely literate 15- and 16-year-old girls who proudly show me the pictures of their new babies, or the 17-year-old guys with the lowest skills and the worst attitudes who boast about all the children they've fathered.

But given the way schools have been run, every first-grader gets only so much time to learn the material and then gets shoved on to the next grade. Many become second-graders in name only; in terms of skills and knowledge, they belong in first grade or preschool.

Add to that the costs of long summer vacations when kids have no escape from the poverty that surrounds them. Lois Berlin, principal of George Mason Elementary and an advocate of year-round school, says that to reach their potential, "Kids need the continuity. We spend so much time at the beginning of the year reviewing the last year."

But no matter how much progress a school makes with disadvantaged children, that school will be viewed by the public as inferior unless it has a large number of middle-class kids to counterbalance the test scores of the disadvantaged. When parents visit George Mason to see if they want to enroll their children, they often ask Berlin, "How are your test scores?" And she usually responds, "They're abysmal." On the latest national Stanford 9 tests, George Mason's average score was at the 50th percentile. "I tell them ... you have to compare individual kids from the beginning to the end of the year ... to look at the strengths and weaknesses of individual kids rather than at how the whole school performs. Some kids go from the 20th percentile to the 25th in a year; others go from the 92nd to the 98th. For each kid, that's big improvement. You have to measure individual kids against themselves."

One of the more subtle effects of the emphasis on test scores is that low-scoring kids come away with the message that they are doomed regardless of their efforts, while high-scoring kids feel they've got it made and don't really have to work that hard. Analyze the results along racial lines, and you have a recipe for continued failure.

Test scores, like other statistics, can confuse or clarify the picture. The fact that every year so many of those low-income kids in my "regular" classes score below the 10th percentile on the PSAT is graphic confirmation that schools have a long way to go to make up for the effects of poverty.

What I've seen is not only more black kids studying hard, scoring higher and signing up for honors courses, but more going on to college. Gap or no gap, that's good news.

The Wall Street Journal, **March 16, 1999**

Score on the SAT to Score on the Field

By Joe Paterno

Last week a federal judge gave new meaning to "March Madness" when he overturned the National Collegiate Athletic Association's minimum test-score requirements for athletes. According to Judge Ronald L. Buckwalter, these rules violate the civil rights of African-Americans, who fare worse on these tests than white students do. Some college coaches welcomed the judge's decision, but I'm very concerned about what will happen if we eliminate basic academic standards for athletes.

The NCAA standard—known as Proposition 16—was hardly onerous. To be eligible to play in his freshman year, an athlete had to have a 2.0 high school grade point average and a score of 820 out of 1600 on the Scholastic Assessment Test (the average score is 1017). Keep in mind that SAT scoring was changed a few years ago in response to complaints that it was socially biased; it's easier to get 820 today than in years past.

Even if a student doesn't meet that low threshold, he can still enroll in college but can't play until he takes some remedial courses and proves that he belongs in a university. The success rate is higher with this approach than if you allow an athlete to play at once; you can't do remedial studying if you're practicing every day in a high-pressure Division I basketball or football program.

No matter how low the current standards, the NCAA can't eliminate them altogether because of the possibility that high school grades might be bogus. We instituted these standards because a lot of kids were getting admitted to universities when they weren't prepared. Universities were really exploiting these athletes.

Since we instituted minimum test score requirements, we've made noticeable progress. Graduation rates have improved, especially among black student athletes, and kids are coming in better prepared. The NCAA standards have been particularly helpful to high school counselors and coaches, who now have a stick they can wave at athletes. They can tell these students, "If you want to go to a big school and be a great athlete, you've got to do more reading, more preparing, more studying."

Some people say we're depriving inner-city kids of an opportunity to go to college, that we should take a "chance" on some kid who doesn't do well on academic tests. I have no problem with giving a kid a chance if that's really why the coach is recruiting him, not because he needs a pivotal player for his team. But remember that when you admit one student you keep out another.

We don't have an unlimited number of scholarships to hand out. In football each university is allowed no more than 85 athletes on scholarship at one time. In basketball, Division I schools are allowed 13. If you admit a poor student who's a great athlete, are you keeping out a better student who's a slightly poorer athlete? Can we justify forcing that better student to find loans and a job to go to college because he can't get the grant that went to someone else? Is dropping academic standards fair to him?

Those who argue that the NCAA policy is racist have to show that it has led to a significantly diminished number of African-American students in Division I basketball and football programs. I don't see it.

In fact at Penn State we have more blacks on our teams than ever before, and more of them are graduating. Penn State's football program has a graduation rate of about 80% in recent years—and keep in mind that transfers to other schools count against you in the numbers. We've been very selective academically in recent years, and we've had more, not fewer, African-Americans.

We don't know what will happen now. It depends on whether the courts will grant a stay of the judge's ruling, and how the NCAA will react to whatever happens. We at Penn State are not going to lower our standards no matter what NCAA policy is.

The real danger is that college sports in general could revert to the pre-Proposition 16, win-at-all-costs atmosphere. Winning football or basketball games means an awful lot to big universities, and human nature being what it is, some schools will bring in athletes just to have a good team, and if they don't graduate, so what?

Instituting standards doesn't mean we ignore the problems of the underclass—quite the contrary. You have to address the problem of kids being raised by single parents or no parents. But you don't help them by lowering standards. That problem has to be addressed in elementary schools and high schools. We at universities have to attack the problem from our end by demanding certain standards for kids to be eligible to play. That's the only way we'll keep the pressure on athletically talented youngsters to realize that their education comes first.

Mr. Paterno is the football coach at Penn State University.

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The Washington Post Magazine, April 11, 1999

True Tests

By Jay Mathews

By then my brain was limp from too much thought, so I cannot pinpoint the moment. I think it was near the end of the second day of the International Baccalaureate 20th-century history examinations at George Mason High School in Falls Church. As I tried to revive my depleted synapses for another round of essay questions, I heard a student announce that he wanted to leave early for a baseball game.

Erin McVadon Albright, the IB coordinator at George Mason, looked at the athlete as if he had just said Winston Churchill was a fan dancer. Her words vibrated in the small school library: *"This is MORE IMPORTANT than baseball."*

I am not sure she was right, but I have come to see her point. The IB program has attracted many teenagers previously considered immune to deep thought. Historical synthesis or derivative analysis or any of a number of intellectual exercises, done the IB way, can be as compelling as a two-out triple. The program also offers a way out of an old debate about memory and insight that bedevils modern educators.

Taking the tests was a costly stunt, I admit. Immediately afterward I had to take a long nap. But I write about high school students as an education reporter, and I crave the pseudo-authenticity of a few hours walking in my subjects' loosely laced sneakers.

I am also obsessed with high-stakes tests and how they influence public education. Two years ago I persuaded the faculty of a suburban New York high school to let me take the Advanced Placement American history test. At the last minute they pulled me out of the cafeteria test site and put me in a small room by myself, saying they didn't want to distract the real students. My theory is they feared too many 16-year-olds would see this balding stranger wielding a No. 2 pencil and wonder if they were doomed to remain in high school until they passed the test.

There were good reasons for my fixation with the AP and the IB. Both tests, and the courses designed to prepare for them, expose high school students to college-level material and provide a chance for college credit. Both were created decades ago to serve tiny elites but have evolved into instruments for remaking the culture of ordinary public schools. I have seen energetic teachers use the AP test, available in more than half of U.S. secondary schools, to change lives. There is a remarkable power in showing an allegedly mediocre student that she can pass the same national test that the smart kids are listing on their applications to Yale and U-Va.

The George Mason teachers, amused at my playing test-stressed teen, showed me why IB is even better than AP. It is available in only 268 U.S. schools but is growing fast. It has been proved to stimulate youthful interest in music and science and community service. At George Mason an extraordinary 81 percent of juniors and seniors are taking at least one IB course.

Unlike most AP courses, the IB course does not allow students to skip the final exam without penalty. The AP test is three hours, with half of the questions multiple choice, while my IB test was five hours of essay questions. The range of IB questions reduces the student's need to cover everything at the risk of learning nothing. Depth is guaranteed by the requirement of a 2,500-word paper, which I had to defend before a panel of teachers and experts.

George Mason principal Bob Snee persuaded the IB authorities in Switzerland to allow me to participate so long as my identity was closely held. I took it as a sad indicator of the slick predictability of my paper on Sino-American relations that one faculty grader announced: "No student wrote this. It must have come off the Internet."

I learned something, however, by watching Abby Burroughs, George Mason '98, defend her paper on Leon Trotsky and the New Economic Policy. Her work was deep and surprising and better than half the papers I remember from graduate school. It showed how much could be expected of young people asked to do something out of the ordinary.

The District, Virginia and many other states are struggling with new high-stakes, multiple-choice, detail-oriented tests, reigniting the old debate between those who want students to learn facts first and then analyze and those who want that process reversed. Here, I think, is one possible solution: Spend a little more money for something like the IB, which simultaneously demands both memory and thought. As long as the tests are independently assessed—the IB has 2,500 graders in more than 60 countries—no teacher or administrator can dumb down the courses without being caught.

Unlike me, trying to slide through my two days of test hell with cute similes and glib digressions, students would be exploring, synthesizing, theorizing and learning how to learn. Done right, that could be almost as important as baseball. ■

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PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY STEPHEN FRAILEY

The Wall Street Journal, March 23, 1999

Academic Question

Why Has Senior Year Of High School Lost Its Purpose for Many?

Colleges Pick Kids Earlier, Students Prefer to Work And Slackers Lose Interest

Those 11th-Grade 'Exit Exams'

By JUNE KRONHOLZ
Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

ALEXANDRIA, Va.—Two and a half months into his senior year at Thomas A. Edison High School last fall, Andy Wong learned he'd been accepted into the University of Virginia freshman class for this fall. So, with 26 courses on his transcript—five more than he needs to graduate—he's using his last year of high school to earn credits toward his first year in college.

Which raises the question: What's the point of the senior year anyway?

Forget the idea that it's a time to plan for the future: Huge numbers of kids have that settled even before the football season is over. The make-or-break SAT college-entrance examination is in October—and students now can sign up for it a year in advance. College acceptance letters start arriving before the leaves turn: Purdue University in West Lafayette, Ind., offers seats beginning in mid-September. Harvard fills more than half its freshman class by Christmas.

The early-decision process—in which colleges give priority acceptances to youngsters who then are committed to attend—means growing numbers of high schoolers are locked into a college decision by December. The College Board says 204 colleges now offer early decision, and filled 49,000 of their seats that way this year—one for every 17 kids going to a four-year college.

A Long, Slow Windup

Forget, too, the idea that the senior year is a time to summarize or consolidate learning. State exit exams—which sound like they're meant to test what a youngster has learned in four years of high school—are over long before the exit is anywhere close. New Jersey's exit exam is in the 11th grade, and based on 10th-grade skills. Tennessee's is in the ninth grade, and geared to what an eighth-grader should know. Indeed, according to educators who monitor such tests, the only students who take exit exams in the 12th grade are those who flunked them in earlier grades.

With the emphasis on passing enough courses to graduate, rather than on taking the right courses to succeed, enrollment in tough math and science classes drops. Only one in five seniors takes trigonometry; one in four takes physics. The government-appointed National Commission on Excellence in Education recommended years ago that all youngsters take at least four English classes, three in social studies, and two each in math and science before they graduate. But 37% of seniors graduate with less than those minimums, and 23% graduate with just that.

All this means that the senior year has gradually become a holding tank for thousands of youngsters. Almost one in four of the country's 2.5 million high-school seniors works 20 hours a week or more, and these aren't baby-sitting jobs that might allow time to study. About 25% of seniors work in food-service jobs; another quarter work in sales or as cashiers. Laurence Steinberg, a professor of psychology at Temple University in Philadelphia, studied seniors to see if they took easier courses when they began working; a third of them said they did.

Perhaps not surprisingly, 22% of the students in public four-year colleges take at least one remedial-education course in their first year. When Public Agenda, an independent polling organization, asked if recent high-school graduates had the skills they needed to succeed in college or at work, 68% of employers and 52% of professors said no.

Also forget the idea that the senior year is a time to develop leadership or demonstrate responsibility. Whether out of boredom or rebellion, 91% of seniors cut school now and then, the Department of Education says. "They're moving on, and they start a little early," says Janice Dreis, a senior-class adviser at New Trier Township High in Winnetka, Ill.

About 60% of seniors concede that they spend fewer than six hours on homework every week, while 40% say they spend at least three hours every day watching television. Lots of seniors tell researchers they regularly read for pleasure, go to church, take music lessons and spend time with their parents. But 27% also admit that they had at least five drinks in a row during some night over the past two weeks.

Finally, forget the idea that it's necessarily the kids who are to blame for the senior-year malaise. Record numbers of seniors are finding their courses so unchallenging that they're signing up for advanced-placement, or AP, classes, which earn them college credits while they're still in high school. The University of Michigan in Ann Arbor says that 80% of its freshmen arrive with some college credits. The University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill says it has admitted youngsters with as many as 45 college credits—enough to make them second-semester sophomores before they ever set foot on campus.

Radical Rethinking

All this is prompting some schools to rethink the senior year. Affluent, hyper-achieving New Trier, where almost everyone goes on to college, still finds that "we have seniors dying on the vine," says Mrs. Dreis. So, beginning six years ago, New Trier gave seniors the option of spending the last four weeks of school on a senior project that undergoes a jury evaluation and is exhibited for the whole school to see. Last year's seniors, among other things, cataloged fish for the

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Continued From First Page

Field Museum, shadowed a police officer, studied Farsi, planned a golf tournament and practiced for a trumpet recital.

Central Park East Secondary, a New York public school, requires that its seniors take a course at City College to graduate from high school, and complete a 100-hour internship at such neighboring institutions as the Museum of Modern Art, the police station or Mount Sinai Hospital (the morgue is a popular assignment).

A group of high schools around Ithaca, N.Y., encourages students with an interest in medicine to spend their senior year at the local hospital. The high schools base teachers at the hospital for English and other required courses; seniors spend the rest of the day with professional mentors. "It makes the curriculum really relevant," says Katrin Turek, assistant superintendent of the Ithaca schools.

Vito Perrone, director of teacher education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, says educators have talked for years about remodeling the senior year to require a project or recital or internship—"something that matters," he says.

Beyond that, parents often battle anything that would make their kids' high-school curriculum different from anyone else's. Harvard professor Janine Bempechat remembers the scuffle when she advised a Connecticut high school to switch to block scheduling—that is, offering math and English two hours a day for one semester each, rather than one hour a day for two semesters each. Fearing some undefined disadvantage on the SAT or in college admission, "the parents went nuts," says Ms. Bempechat.

At Thomas Edison High here in suburban Washington, D.C., springtime graduation rituals are gathering speed on a recent day, even as a winter snowstorm rages outside. There's a poll under way to choose prom colors. But, for most seniors here, that's about the extent of the surprises. The theme for the June 22 graduation party is set: A city recreation center will be decorated to look like a cruise ship. A senior-class beach week follows that, and motel reservations already are in. And most who are college-bound have known for weeks, if not months, where they'll be attending school next fall.

Edison is a sprawling place, built in the 1960s to school the early baby boomers. Remodeled and enlarged, it's now educating the record numbers of kids the record number of boomers produced. Edison's 1,420 students aren't much different from those at many suburban schools: Half of them are minorities, 30% qualify for free lunches because of family income, 6% are learning English as a second language, 12% are in special education. Their SAT scores were just below the national average last year, nicely above it this year. Just over half go on to four-year colleges.

Andy Wong, who took early decision from the University of Virginia at Charlottesville to study engineering, settled his future sooner than most of his Edison classmates. Still, the once-common practice of universities sending out their acceptances in April is long past. Brianna Wilkins, who plans to study government and law, heard from the University of Michigan and Michigan State in December. Rosalia Gaytan, who dreams of opening a pastry shop, was accepted into a culinary course at the College of Mexico in Mexico City in early February.

"By the senior year, you already know where you're going to go and what you're going to do," says John Francis, who has been accepted by the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy in Kings Point, N.Y. That means that motivating kids who already have one foot in the future can be problematic. "Kids who start out the year pumped somehow get distracted," says Luther Fennell, who has been a principal for 27 years, seven of them at Edison.

Most colleges demand final grades from graduating seniors to prevent a slide, and can revoke an admission. But Esther Ramirios, assistant director of admissions at Purdue, says that for that to happen "you'd have to completely screw up: not go to class, not turn in homework, change drastically." Jerome Lucido, director of admissions at North Carolina, says he has canceled admissions only "a handful of times," and then more often for things like cheating or being convicted of a crime.

Things could change for some future seniors when Virginia's tough new standardized tests become mandatory for graduation in the year 2004. But in any event, students will take them at the end of certain courses beginning in the ninth grade, and could finish all six required tests before their senior year.

Exit tests and final reports aren't necessary for high achievers, of course. "We stay motivated because that's the way we're brought up," says Brianna Wilkins, who is senior-class president, takes three advanced-placement classes, volunteers at a hospital, plays softball and works at a pizza parlor 35 hours a week. "You work hard because there's always somebody out there who wants your spot," adds John Francis, who should know—he wants a spot at the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Md.

Few kids are that focused, though. Oscar Molina, who leaves for the Marine Corps four days after graduation, says he regularly vows "to bring my grades up, and then the next day I see myself slacking again." As the year winds down, "our marginal students become more marginal," says Lonnie Lowery, head of attendance and discipline. Absences increase, discipline frays. "They act out of character," he says. Michael Graham, who wants to attend St. Paul's College in Lawrenceville, Va., and eventually open a kennel, smiles slyly at the mention of hooky—"a senior obligation," he insists.

With their focus already straying, seniors then compound the problem by taking jobs. Tony Rugari, a senior-class adviser, tells the youngsters not to work while they're in school. "Most can't do it," he says. But so many try that Edison is giving academic credit to Trent Conklin for working 35 hours a week at a grocery store, and Christina Manning for working 40 hours a week at McDonald's—something it calls cooperative learning.

Educators who try to explain why U.S. teenagers score so poorly on international math and science tests claim it's partly because they spend so much time at work instead of studying. The National Research Council says 53% of U.S. teenagers hold jobs, compared with 17% of Japanese teens and 7% in France. The National Restaurant Association says that 1.5 million of the country's 10.5 million restaurant workers are 18 or younger.

Christina Manning, who talks of working in an office after graduation, concedes that her McDonald's job allows little time for studying, even though she leaves school early to go to work, and that she has taken only as many courses as she absolutely must to graduate. She needs the money, she says—she pays $50 a week to her family for room and board.

The notion of high-school seniors holding jobs to raise college tuition or help with the family bills is largely a false one, though. Suburban kids, presumably more affluent than others, work more often and longer hours than do city youngsters, the Department of Education says. It adds that 80% of seniors use "none or only a little" of their earnings to help with family expenses, and other studies find that only four in 10 save any of it for college.

After 10 months on the job, Trent Conklin admits he has saved only "a couple hundred" dollars toward his tuition at Northern Virginia Community College in Fairfax County. "I blew a lot in trying to have fun," he says. Adds Oscar Molina, the future Marine: "We throw our money away—we're kids. But we're learning."

$(SR)^2$

Selected Readings on School Reform

Teacher Quality

Everyone agrees that the quality of teachers has a powerful impact on student achievement, and, as such, it's essential for states to make better teacher quality a high priority. How states go about doing that, however, is the stuff of considerable debate. In a manifesto released this spring, entitled "The Teachers We Need and How to Get More of Them," our Foundation (and dozens of prominent manifesto signers) advanced the position that states should decrease the amount of regulation that hinders talented individuals from entering the classroom and instead increase principals' freedom to hire good candidates in return for greater accountability for their students' achievement. (The manifesto is included in *Better Teachers, Better Schools*, which accompanies this edition of $(SR)^2$.) Jay Mathews of *The Washington Post* reports on this "Call for Educational Change" and the array of governors, educators, and researchers who signed the manifesto. *The Columbus-Dispatch* follows up with an endorsement.

Another astute observer of the teacher scene is Carol Innerst. Her *Washington Monthly* article, "Method Madness," describes the ed school mania that stresses self-esteem building, getting in touch with your feelings about the classroom, and all kinds of pedagogical wizardry at the expense of preparing teachers in their subjects. Innerst calls both for higher academic standards in education schools and for greater access to alternative certification.

Next, we bring you a trio from the *Los Angeles Times*. In "Selling Teachers on School Reform," reporter Richard Lee Colvin observes that even some union bosses are catching on to the public's sense of frustration with ineffective teachers and unaccountable schools. In response, they want raises linked to performance; however, the "rank and file remain leery." In a second article, "States Not Raising Teacher Standards, Study Finds," Colvin reports on the recent Education Trust report that found teacher licensing tests are not rigorous enough and, on top of that, states set low cut-off scores. One reason for the low cut-off scores is to ensure a sufficient supply of teachers. Randy Ross opines in "Class Size Reduction Doesn't Benefit All" that all the fanfare over California's class size reduction has obscured another issue, namely, that smaller classes mean more teachers and this leads to more inexperienced teachers who tend to end up in poor, inner-city schools.

Arthur Levine, president of Teachers College, Columbia University, in his *New York Times* op-ed, "Dueling Goals of Education," detects the same problem. Levine thinks that smaller classes and better teachers will be at odds unless we take steps to prevent the clash. Such steps might include strengthening teacher education, improving financial incentives for those considering the profession, and opening up alternative certification.

When alternative certification is mentioned, skeptics ask about the quality of candidates that this practice will draw. Writing in *The Boston Globe*, Beth Daley offers hope. Her article "Class Career Moves" profiles five talented mid-career professionals who joined the Boston teaching force. Open the doors and they will pour in.

DDW

The Washington Post, April 20, 1999

A Call for Education Change

Panel Seeks New Measure of Teachers' Performance

By Jay Mathews
Washington Post Staff Writer

A panel of governors, educators and researchers yesterday called for a radical change in educational standards that would put greater emphasis on teachers' in-class performance than their college training and licensing.

Under this approach, school principals would be granted more authority to recruit competent and imaginative teachers and to fire teachers whose students do not learn and perform poorly on carefully designed tests.

The 52 signers of the unusual online manifesto include Michigan Gov. John Engler (R) and Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Ridge (R).

"We conclude that the regulatory strategy being pursued today to boost teacher quality is seriously flawed," the manifesto declared. "Every additional requirement for prospective teachers . . . will limit the potential supply of teachers by narrowing the pipeline."

Instead, panel members said that schools should "focus relentlessly on results, on whether students are learning." This new approach will produce a larger supply of able teachers and "will tie judgments about their fitness and performance to success in the classroom, not to process or impression," according to the group.

The proposal immediately drew criticism. Willis D. Hawley, executive director of the Washington-based National Partnership for Excellence and Accountability in Teaching, said the manifesto overlooks the proven value of teacher credentials. "One of the best predictors of low student performance in Prince George's County is the number of uncertified teachers at a school," he said.

Chuck Williams, director for teacher quality at the National Education Association, said licensing teachers is still in an early stage, as licensing doctors was a century ago, and should not be abandoned. He said he shared the manifesto's desire for good teaching applicants, "but brightness and intelligence alone do not result in quality teaching."

The manifesto, titled "The Teachers We Need and How to Get More of Them," contradicts efforts by many states and the federal government to improve teaching by improving teacher education programs, including raising the minimum test scores needed to enroll in education courses and acquire a teaching license.

The proposal also runs counter to efforts by the Washington-based National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education to force education schools to raise their standards.

The manifesto said teachers should be judged instead on how well they do in the classroom, using techniques such as the "value-added" analysis devised by William Sanders of the University of Tennessee to rate teachers in his state. Sanders showed that the top 20 percent of teachers boosted scores of low-achieving students by 53 percentile points, compared with only a 14 percentile-point increase by students of the bottom 20 percent of teachers.

The manifesto grew out of discussions among education researchers brought together by the Washington-based Thomas B. Fordham Foundation. The signers include state education officials in Arizona, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Michigan and Colorado as well as former education secretary William J. Bennett and University of Virginia professor E.D. Hirsch.

Several signers said they hoped the manifesto, at *www.edexcellence.net*, would encourage more states to follow New Jersey in offering mid-career professionals ways to cut through red tape in qualifying to teach. John Truscott, Engler's press secretary, noted that "the governor can't teach a government class in Michigan, and yet no one in the state knows more about government than he does."

The Columbus Dispatch, May 26, 1999

CERTIFIED FAILURE TEACHER-TRAINING SYSTEM NEEDS OVERHAUL

Teachers who are not trained in the subjects they teach add up to a big problem in American schools, as President Clinton noted last week, when he unveiled his $ 15 billion proposal to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

A third of math teachers and two-thirds of science teachers in high schools did not major or minor in the subjects they teach, according to one estimate.

This may help explain why these also are subjects in which American students test abysmally in competition with their peers in other advanced nations.

The president noted that overall, a quarter of secondary-school teachers don't have even a college minor in the subjects they are teaching. He also pointed out that each year about 50,000 people are employed in U.S. classrooms with "emergency" certifications, meaning they are not fully certified to teach.

This shortcoming is worst in inner-city schools, where the turnover in classroom staff is high, as teachers bail out for better pay and conditions in suburban schools.

The president proposes to solve this problem by demanding that within four years, schools that receive federal money end the use of uncertified teachers and stop assigning certified teachers to subjects in which they are not experts.

The president's proposal includes money to toughen certification standards for teachers and for training and recruiting teachers.

But despite its good intentions, this plan fails to get at the roots of the problem, which are:

*The teacher-certification process itself.

* The inability of most school districts to use pay incentives to staff less attractive schools and to attract teachers with expertise in subjects for which there is high demand.

Marci Kanstoroom, research director for the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, which focuses on education reform, made these points forcefully two weeks ago in testimony before the U.S. House of Representatives.

Kanstoroom, who also is a research fellow at the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research in New York, summarized the findings in a Fordham policy manifesto titled, "The Teachers We Need and How to Get More of Them," which she presented to Congress.

The manifesto says that many people who are highly trained in science, mathematics and other subjects are discouraged from becoming teachers because of the tedium, time and cost of taking the "how-to-teach" classes most states require for certification.

College math majors and retired engineers who know physics and chemistry might make excellent teachers but will be deterred by what many regard as the dubious pedagogical instruction that goes on in the nation's teachers colleges.

This point was made in February by U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley, who said, "Too many potential teachers are turned away because of the cumbersome process that requires them to jump through hoops and lots of them."

Toughening certification standards only makes the problem worse, the manifesto argues. "The entry and hiring process should be greatly simplified. Instead of requiring a long list of courses and degrees, we should test future teachers for their knowledge and skills and allow principals to hire the teachers they need."

In return for such freedom, schools would be held strictly accountable for higher student achievement, the manifesto says.

But the policy prescription doesn't stop there. "Common sense also argues that teachers of subjects in short supply should be paid more than those in fields that are amply supplied, that teachers working in hard-to- staff schools should be paid more than those working in schools with hundreds of applicants . . . and that outstanding teachers should be paid more than mediocre ones. Yet today, the typical public-school salary schedule (and teachers union contract) allows for none of these common-sensical practices."

Finally, the manifesto urges, schools should be able to fire teachers who prove incompetent.

That Kanstoroom's recommendations, so fundamental to success, efficiency and competitiveness in the private sector, are regarded as radical ideas in the realm of public education seems incredible.

Her larger point is that the current system focuses its money and attention on regulation and inputs -- teacher-certification rules, degrees and years of service -- instead of emphasizing the end result: namely, successful students.

If the stringent teacher-certification regulations already in place around the country are failing to provide enough high-quality teachers, she argued, it is illogical to think that making those standards even tougher will help.

Editor's note: The Fordham Foundation policy manifesto can be found on the World Wide Web at www.edexcellence.net/ library/teacher.htm

Washington Monthly, May, 1999

Method Madness

Why are public school teachers so poorly trained?

BY CAROL INNERST

WITH A NEW SEMESTER JUST getting underway, Paula Kelberman's first order to her class of prospective elementary school teachers at East Stroudsberg University in Pennsylvania was to rearrange the tables in the classroom. They were lined up in rows. She wanted them in a "U" shape because rows are "boring" and too "traditional." Rows also apparently promote individualism, which would-be teachers learn is bad, rather than cooperation, which encourages students to talk and work together. "This is not a course that will tax you in terms of ... reading," the professor continued. "I'm not as interested in your grade as I am interested in your ability to explain your own process. The final product will not be as important as the effort, the process you put into it."

These techniques—stressing how rather than what to teach—are common in the 1,300 colleges and universities responsible for training our future teachers. Educators have complained for decades about the failure of teacher ed programs to offer teachers any substantial training in subject matter. But despite a spate of reports and recommendations and flurries of activity in the name of teacher education reform, little has changed in the way most teacher training institutions go about their business. Most still attract students of average or below average intellectual ability. Most still make it easy for students to get into teacher education programs, often after they have failed coursework in another discipline. And most still view their role, and the primary role of the teachers they train, as change agents whose mission is to work toward social justice and equity in the classroom rather than academic achievement. The 1993 mission statement of the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education explains: "First and foremost, quality teacher education [programs] must be places of active conscience. The professional commitment to social justice, and the ethics of equity and diversity in the American culture must be palpable."

Social justice and equity are commendable goals for society, and no one could quarrel with the need for conscientious teachers who know how to create a harmonious classroom atmosphere. Moreover, some pedagogical training is clearly necessary, especially for teaching younger children (if you doubt it, try spending a day as a substitute third-grade teacher). But the foundation for learning is built in the elementary years and too often, the basics of teaching kids to read, write, and compute lose out to educational fads that focus on building self-esteem and discouraging competition.

For instance, in an effort to avoid competition and hierarchy, ed schools promote something called "cooperative learning"—putting students of varying abilities to work together on a project. Cooperative learning can be an excellent educational technique in some circumstances. But when used exclusively—as it often is—it enforces a lowest common denominator on the group and holds individuals back. Prospective teachers are subjected to large doses of cooperative learning as well, as professors model the desired teaching techniques. Other current teaching fads include "developmentally appropriate" learning, which posits that education is a natural unfolding that occurs at different times for different children and discourages teaching them to read and write before they are "ready." E.D. Hirsch, the education critic and author of *The Schools We Need and Why We Don't Have Them*, testified before Congress that "this doctrine is drummed into almost all teachers who take early-education courses. The intention is to ensure caring treatment of young children, yet the ultimate effect of

CAROL INNERST *is a writer who formerly covered education for* The Washington Times.

the doctrine is to cause social harm. To withold demanding content from young children between preschool and third grade has an effect which is quite different from the one intended. It leaves advantaged children [who get knowledge at home] with boring pabulum, and it condemns disadvantaged children to a permanent educational handicap that grows worse over time."

To make matters worse, today's prospective teachers are often themselves the products of poor schooling and arrive on campus requiring remediation in math, writing, and sometimes reading. Consequently textbooks used in teachers colleges have been dumbed down to the point where a book used for a sophomore-level child psychology course, for example, "is written at what used to be a 10th or 11th grade high school reading level," according to John E. Stone, an education professor at East Tennessee State University.

Small wonder then that 59 percent of newly-graduated Massachusetts teachers, steeped in methodology designed to make students feel good about themselves but bereft of factual knowledge about any subject, failed a literacy exam given by the state last year. This was no isolated incident. The previous spring, Connetquot school district on Long Island in New York state got 758 applications in response to an advertisement to fill 35 teaching vacancies. District officials decided to narrow the pool by asking applicants to take a short version of a multiple choice reading comprehension test taken from the state's old 11th grade Regents English exams. Just 202 applicants correctly answered at least 40 of the 50 questions.

Not too long ago it was expected that a child would learn to read by the end of first grade. In recent years, that expectation has been pushed back to the end of third grade—and many children still fail to learn because their teachers were never properly taught how to teach them. The prevailing "whole language" philosophy of reading instruction sees learning to read as a natural process that will come in time when the child is developmentally ready to learn to read. A good example of the chasm between education professors and parents (and even many teachers) is the language war over the best way to teach reading—phonics or whole language. Most schools of education continue to train prospective teachers in whole language even though research shows that early, systematic phonics instruction is necessary for 30 to 40 percent of beginning readers. It takes a brave teacher to buck the belief system and whip out flash cards when she sees children struggling to read because they have not been taught to sound out the letters of the alphabet. California, which saw its reading scores plummet after years of whole language instruction, has ordered schools to teach phonics, but there is massive resistance to this change.

Small wonder that 59 percent of newly-graduated Massachussetts teachers, steeped in methodology designed to make students feel good about themselves, failed a literacy exam given by the state last year.

Parents complain, too, that their children reach middle school and can't multiply because teachers have been trained to emphasize "higher level thinking skills" rather the mundane memorization of the multiplication tables. Rote memorization is bad, teacher trainees are told. Learning any facts is useless, they hear, because information is constantly changing and increasing. It would be impossible to teach or absorb it all.

A 1997 Public Agenda survey documented a huge disparity between what parents want their children to be taught in school, and what professors of education want them to learn. Parents want orderly schools that emphasize the academic fundamentals. Education professors want less structured schooling that facilitates inquiry and stresses "learning how to learn." Despite evidence that disadvantaged children especially benefit from traditional "direct instruction" (the teacher has information and transmits it to the pupil), Public Agenda found that even for this group education professors continued to preach process and learner-centered teaching in which children "construct their own knowledge."

Raising the Bar

To become a public school teacher, college graduates have to be certified by the state. Prospective teachers must take required general education and education courses, do a stint at student teaching, and pass a series of general knowledge tests. The passing scores on these tests vary from state to state but tend to be low. As a result, a lot of unqualified teachers get into the classroom. In the early '80s a few states weed-

ed out the illiterates by testing veteran teachers, but howls from the teachers unions soon nipped that practice in the bud. For their part, unions complained that too many teachers were assigned to classes in subjects they had not trained in. A math teacher, for example, might be asked to take over a physics class because of a shortage of physics teachers.

Prodded by public officials, states like Pennsylvania are attempting to address the problem of teacher quality in a variety of ways, including forcing changes in the way the teacher training schools do business. Governor Tom Ridge and Secretary of Education Eugene W. Hickok have launched reform initiatives to upgrade teacher training. The first thing they've done is make it harder to get into state schools of education by increasing the required minimum grade point average to a 2.5 or higher, depending on the specialty. They're also making it harder to get licensed as a teacher and are forcing schools to eliminate the watered-down content courses for teachers, replacing them with rigorous curricula that put the emphasis on subject mastery. There is considerable resentment among the deans and other high-level administrators, but privately some faculty members at the schools of education are cheering the efforts.

Pennsylvania's East Stroudsburg University, for example, raised the grade point average needed to get into elementary education from 2.5 to 2.75. Students still need to take 60 hours in general education, but no longer have a smorgasbord of courses to choose from. A would-be secondary math teacher now must take the same math course a math major takes, not an easier course designed especially for teachers.

Hickok, who gave up his tenure at Dickinson College to continue working on education reform during the final four years of the Ridge administration, remains disappointed that teaching is "still attracting too many students who really aren't of the intellectual calibre I'd like to see. On any college campus, the best and the brightest aren't going into education," he said. "That will take time." Some deans of schools of education agree. Dean Edwin J. Delattre of Boston University School of Education—one of the harshest critics of teacher training—says there are no more than 50 good teacher training institutions among the 1,300 in the country. Of the others, he says: "They admit and graduate students who have low levels of intellectual accomplishment. ... They are well-intentioned, decent, nice people who by and large don't know what they're doing."

Three years ago BU began to target only teacher applicants with high SAT scores. The inquiry pool immediately dropped 17 percent, but SAT scores of the freshman class topped 1200 that year—more than 300 points higher than the average self-declared education majors who took the 1996 SAT. BU also doubled the amount of time prospective teachers must spend in math class and made an ethics course mandatory.

Some schools, among them George Mason University's Graduate School of Education, are tying teacher training to professional development schools—public schools that bridge the chasm between the theorists at universities and the practitioners dealing with real children in real classrooms. These schools work closely with teacher training institutions and allow prospective teachers to use their classrooms for extensive field experience. The program uses the school's veteran teachers as mentors to the student teachers and also brings university professors out of their ivory tower and into a real classroom. New teachers say the extended practical experience is extremely beneficial. Dean Gary R. Galluzzo of George Mason is a strong advocate of professional development schools. He remembers going through teacher training and not seeing any students until his first day of student teaching. "I didn't see a teenager until my first day in that school in 1973," he said. "That's wrong."

Another way to improve the quality of teaching is through alternative certification programs. If properly designed and executed, such programs can open public classroom doors to people like Hickok, who has taught at the college level but is deemed unqualified to teach in a public K-12 school because he has not jumped through the hoops of ed-school methodology training. The nation's first true alternative certification program was pioneered by New Jersey in the '80s. The program, which attracted more minorities to teaching than the regular teacher college route, put college graduates with a bachelor's degree into K-12 classrooms where they worked with a mentor teacher while taking an abbreviated teacher training program evenings and weekends. Pennsylvania is about to launch a similar initiative that will let bachelor's degree holders teach under a mentor while taking one year of subject-based coursework to obtain a teaching certificate. The key is that the coursework will steep the teacher candidate in the subject he or she has been hired to teach, not just pedagogy.

This kind of alternative certification, which can bypass or at least lessen the impact of the faddish curricula of the teacher training institutions, could

be a potent tool for forcing schools of education to become responsive to and provide the kind of no nonsense teachers that parents and the larger public want to see in K-12 classrooms.

School choice, which allows families to choose the public or private school they want their children to attend with state funding following the child, could also prod schools losing students to rethink their methodologies, putting pressure on the training institutions. In many districts, parents for years have signaled their desire for traditional or basic schools that put an emphasis on subject matter and are dedicated to achievement. The few public schools that feature structure and the basics find parents standing in line for days to try to get their child enrolled. Public charter schools can have the same kind of impact, particularly if their charters successfully free them from the regulatory red tape of hostile local school boards and teachers unions.

Another lever for change could come through the states, which accredit teacher training institutions and license teachers. If a school regularly graduates teachers who can't pass the state's certification test, states can shut that school down. States can also adopt value-added assessments to determine how well teachers are doing in the classroom. Pioneered in Tennessee, value-added assessment requires new teachers to demonstrate their ability to produce achievement in their students, not just pass performance-based exams that test their grasp of the current pedagogical orthodoxy learned in teacher training schools. At a minimum, value-added assessment requires annual testing of students in all grades with a reliable and valid achievement test.

Unfortunately, teacher training reform appears to be headed in the wrong direction. The 1996 report of the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future calls for all teacher training to be aligned with the teacher certification standards developed by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. The National Board's standards are consistent with the "latest research" that supports learner-center teaching and other fads already solidly in place in those institutions. The current push by the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education to bring all teacher training under its auspices would similarly assure that social and attitudinal goals, not academic achievement, remain the priority of teachers. And that would add another nail to the coffin of teacher training reform. ●

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Los Angeles Times, May 6, 1999

Selling Teachers on School Reform

Some union bosses now lead the charge for peer review and tying raises to performance. But many in rank and file remain leery.

By RICHARD LEE COLVIN

Huddled around a conference table in a fancy Seattle hotel, America's most reform-minded teachers union bosses sounded more like crusading politicians than advocates for the rank and file.

Why not tie teachers' raises to their ability to pass demanding tests? Even better, fire slackers who can't cut it. Or, most radical of all, pay teachers based on how much their students learn.

Until recently, union leaders had been loath to even whisper such ideas.

"In the past, being a union boss was like being a defense attorney. If you molested kids or were incompetent, my job was to get you off the hook," said Adam Urbanski, director of the Teacher Union Reform Network, a group of progressive union locals that held one of its regular meetings last fall in Seattle. "That's not flying anymore."

Indeed, unions nationwide are negotiating contracts with provisions that link teachers' skills to their pay. They are developing training programs to improve the skills of veteran teachers. In New York, Cincinnati and elsewhere they are helping administrators shut down failing schools and evaluating colleagues who are not making the grade.

Selling such ideas, however, can be a challenge. Teachers worry that their economic interests are being downplayed to serve a political agenda designed to improve the union image, while administrators often regard union reforms as encroachments on management powers. Many administrators also doubt that the types of reforms supported by unions--which sometimes carry a hefty price tag--will lead to gains in student achievement.

There is reason for skepticism. The results of union reform efforts have been difficult to document. Even members of the reform network say they are frustrated by the slow pace of change.

"We've been talking about these issues since 1986," said Don Whatley, president of the Albuquerque Federation of Teachers. "But very little of it has had any effect on teaching and learning in the classroom."

Still, Whatley and others say unions cannot afford to retreat to their old patterns of confrontation, lest they find themselves losing customers and jobs, as the auto, rubber and steel unions did in the 1970s and 1980s.

Polls of parents and voters show growing support for alternatives to the public schools, such as charter schools, which are usually not unionized and operate free of most state and local regulations, and voucher programs.

"We're losing market share; the customers are bailing," said Day Higuchi, president of United Teachers-Los Angeles. "So we need to say, 'What are the roots of the problem?' "

Teacher Quality a Major Problem

Teacher quality is widely recognized as one of the biggest problems confronting schools today.

In Rochester, N.Y., where Urbanski has long been a leader in the reform movement as president of the union local, teachers judged unsatisfactory by supervisors do not get scheduled raises. Conversely, a contract provision calls for top teachers who earn an extra credential as a reading teacher, or who agree to be deployed in a low-achieving school, to receive a $1,500 annual bonus.

In Boston; Columbus, Ohio; and elsewhere, unions have agreed to campuswide bonuses based on a school's performance.

"The major impact" of the bonuses, said teacher compensation expert Allen Odden of the University of Wisconsin, "is to focus people on the mission of the system."

Employing another strategy, the California Teachers Assn. invested nearly $2 million to develop a class on how to teach children who are not native English speakers. Six hundred teachers have completed that 45-hour course, and nearly 1,000 more are currently enrolled.

The union in the San Juan Unified School District outside Sacramento has worked with the school of education at the local Cal State campus to create a master's degree program to develop the skills teachers need to help reform their schools.

Finally, it has become commonplace for mentor teachers to assist less experienced colleagues. Now more unions are agreeing to have teachers evaluate the work of their colleagues and recommend dismissal of poor performers.

But many teachers fear that the reformers are drawing attention away from what they contend is a bigger problem--a lack of books, supplies and other resources.

The idea of acknowledging that some teachers are doing a lousy job is "a defensive posture, and it's not going to work," said Los Angeles teacher Joshua Pechthalt, a vocal critic of the union local. "It's not going to deal with the problems of the public schools, and it's going to erode solidarity among their own members."

Ed Doherty, president of the Boston Teachers Union, agreed that he and his peers must be careful not to get too far ahead of their members.

"The membership will not tolerate a union not concerned about salaries and sick days," he said.

Still, he said, union leaders must persuade their members of the importance of improving schools. "It really is our responsibility," Doherty said.

Plans Can Carry Hefty Price Tags

Union-led reforms are not always greeted warmly by politicians either. In Seattle, the union has proposed lengthening the school year by 40 days and requiring new teachers to prove their skills or move on. But that plan carries a hefty, $60-million price tag and is meeting resistance from the Washington Legislature.

In Cincinnati, the school board has decided to trim programs--considered national models for how to professionalize teaching--to close a $20-million budget shortfall.

The board has decided to scale back a "career ladder" that pays bonuses of as much as $5,000 to master teachers. The district's highly regarded peer review program, which last year recommended the dismissal of 13 rookie teachers and four veterans, also is shrinking.

The bottom line, said Cincinnati Supt. Steven Adamowski, is that "student achievement has not improved." He acknowledges that an overly centralized district administration is an obstacle to reform, and is working to change that. He also says the rigid regulations of the union contract must be changed as well.

But Sandra Feldman, president of the 1-million-member American Federation of Teachers, calls the notion that unions are roadblocks to reform "the big lie."

Indeed, under the leadership of Al Shanker, her union was among the earliest to call for more demanding academic standards, charter schools, tougher discipline for students and the creation of national certification tests for teachers.

More recently, the federation has been an influential voice touting widespread research showing the importance of phonics in early reading instruction.

The other national teachers union, the 2.4-million-member National Education Assn., got on the reform train more recently.

Soon after he became president of the organization in 1997, Bob Chase called on the group to take risks to improve schools. For example, he said, the union should drop its longtime opposition to peer review programs.

'You Don't Gain . . . Support by Whining'

In the past, Chase said, teachers unions were vulnerable to attack because they were inveterate naysayers.

"You don't gain public support by whining," he said in an interview. "You get public support by not being defensive and by supporting things."

His union recently added 12 experts in teaching to its national staff to help members.

And, with the teachers federation, it has sponsored conferences for new teachers on discipline techniques.

Chase said his union is still pushing bread and butter issues and trying to raise the salaries of teachers, which average $42,000 a year. But, he said, "we hesitate to talk about it because people say, 'Oh, there they go again.' "

Teachers unions in Michigan, for example, are among the most militant in the country, and the teachers there are the highest paid, averaging nearly $59,000 a year. But the Michigan Education Assn. has been defeated time and again in legislative battles by Republican Gov. John Engler.

Michigan now has 150 charter schools, a longer academic year and a ban on paying teachers who go on strike.

"The teachers got so blinded by their hatred for the governor that they almost couldn't see reality," said John Trescott, Engler's spokesman. "They do have to rethink their approach if they hope to have an impact on the process."

Former California Gov. Pete Wilson regarded the California Teachers Assn. as a stubborn obstacle to reform. During his eight years in office, he successfully diverted funds that could have gone for teachers' salaries to textbooks, computers and smaller class sizes. But he was unsuccessful in ending teacher tenure.

Aware of its reputation, the California union in the last two years has softened its rhetoric and embraced some of the school reform measures pushed this winter by Gov. Gray Davis. The union has even endorsed the creation of more charter schools, but with an important caveat--the group is pushing legislation requiring those schools to unionize.

For all the talk at the national and state levels about the need for unions to be partners in reform, contracts get negotiated at the local level. And, on that score, Urbanski said, the record is mixed.

"There are indeed places in this country where the teacher unions are leading reform--that's the good news," he said. "But the bad news is they are the exception, not the norm. In at least as many places as they are leading reform, they are blocking reform."

In Los Angeles, the powerful UTLA has done some of each.

The 40,000-member organization has insisted that new teachers without a credential get a full week of training before entering the classroom and is negotiating with the district to set up professional development centers.

The union also negotiated a 15% raise for Los Angeles teachers who complete the rigorous process of becoming certified by the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards. Last year, 47 Los Angeles Unified School District teachers gained that status, and nearly 200 are preparing to take the certification exams later this year.

But last fall, the union moved wages to the top of the agenda when it launched a "raise the raise" campaign seeking a 4% salary boost in the middle of a three-year contract. Because of its clout on the Los Angeles Board of Education, the union was able to get a 2% raise while agreeing only to limited teacher accountability measures. Just a handful of teachers, those judged unsatisfactory by principals, will be subject to peer review.

Yet even that concession generated opposition within the union and undercut support for President Higuchi. He was recently elected to a second term but with only 57% of the votes, an unusually low figure.

"I think the union is looking at these big, fancy reform issues, and they're not paying attention to the bread and butter," said Warren Fletcher, who unsuccessfully challenged Higuchi for the presidency.

Since getting reelected, Higuchi has been sounding much more strident. He is already gearing up for negotiations next year, demanding a 30% pay raise and promising "no contract, no work."

Learning From Craft Guilds

Elsewhere, reformers are urging bolder steps.

Susan Moore Johnson, dean of the Harvard Graduate School of Education, analyzed contracts in districts across the nation and concluded that administrators often refuse to implement some of the most progressive provisions. On the other hand, she said, unions have continued to insist on seniority provisions that let teachers choose where and what to teach.

Such policies "really do stand in the way of reform," she said.

The foundations that support the work of the Teacher Union Reform Network are becoming impatient and have begun pushing for more decisive action. The organization, founded in 1995 and based at UCLA, consists of 21 locals, including those in Los Angeles and New York.

Ed Reidy, a program officer with the Pew Charitable Trust, one of the network's supporters, said unions could learn a lesson from the craft guilds of the past, which controlled their membership through apprenticeships.

"Unions could say tomorrow that, from here on out, we take teacher quality very seriously and you can't become a full member unless you meet certain standards," he said. "I don't think they're there yet."

Peter Martinez of the Macarthur Foundation is also looking for the reform network to become more aggressive.

"They've got to bite the bullet on setting up a good system for letting bad teachers go," he said. "It needs to be clear to everyone that, if you are good, you're going to be rewarded for that." And, if not, you won't have a job.

As director of the network and president of the Rochester union, Urbanski understands those concerns.

Rochester schools began experimenting with reforms in 1986.

Teachers there were among the first to be given decision-making power over their schools and to agree that teacher leaders ought to earn more for taking extra responsibility. And they were among the first to be asked to evaluate struggling peers.

Yet, for all of that, the district's academic achievement has not been sufficient to persuade most middle class residents of the city to keep their children in the public schools.

Last month, Urbanski, with the backing of his union, proposed something more radical. He wants every campus in the district to have an opportunity to become a charter school free of the central office rules. He also wants such schools to be free to toss out the union contract.

Urbanski hopes that the teachers would still turn to his union for help in negotiating a contract, for teacher training, for help in obtaining grants and other services.

"We're putting our reputation to a test," he said. The bottom line, he said, must be what best serves the interests of children.

"We believe that if the kids do well, we'll do well, and if the kids don't do well and we do, this community won't, nor should they, tolerate our doing well," said Urbanski.

Teacher Compensation

Although teachers unions are under pressure to take the lead in crafting school reform, salaries remain a top priority for them. Unions nationally and in California have succeeded in winning steady pay raises over the past 15 years.

Teachers are paid less than those in some other fields, according to these 1996 national averages. But teachers work an average of 37 weeks a year.

Teacher: $37,594
Asst. professor, public university: $39,000
Accountant: $41,444
Buyer: $46,662
Computer system analyst: $58,529
Engineer: $61,613
Attorney: 65,472
Professor, public university: 69,760

Sources: American Federation of Teachers, National Education Assn.

Los Angles Times, May 26, 1999

States Not Raising Teacher Standards, Study Finds;

Many Have Minimal Requirements. The Need to Fill Jobs and Fear of Lawsuit are Cited as Reasons.

By RICHARD LEE COLVIN

Are you able to read National Geographic? Did you pass junior high math? Then you too might have what it takes to be an elementary school teacher in most states.

If you managed to pass algebra and geometry, then you might also be ready to get some chalk dust under your fingernails by teaching those courses to high school students.

At a time when states are striving to make far greater demands on students, they are not similarly raising their standards for what they expect of teachers, concludes a study to be released today in Washington.

"Millions of children are being damaged daily by under-prepared teachers, because we've refused to establish high enough standards for entry into the field of teaching," said Patte Barth, a policy analyst at the Education Trust who is a coauthor of the report.

Seven states have no licensing exams for new teachers. Only 29 states require prospective high school teachers to pass tests in the subject they plan to teach.

The content of those tests is "within easy reach of many of the students the test-takers are expected to teach," the report said.

Moreover, states set low passing scores. In Georgia, an applicant can miss more than half the questions on a math test for high school teachers and still earn a license. Oregon sets the highest passing mark in the nation on that test, but aspiring teachers still can miss a third of the questions.

Passing marks are set low to ensure a sufficient supply of teachers but also to avoid lawsuits by dissatisfied job-seekers, the report said.

California requires all teachers to take a basic skills test. A lawsuit charging that the test, known as the California Basic Educational Skills Test, is illegal and racially discriminatory is making its way through the courts. During that litigation, the state removed virtually all questions requiring knowledge of geometry and algebra.

Now, that test no longer expects those who take it to know the difference between a median, a mode and a mean--the midpoint of a series, the most frequent number in a series and the point that is commonly referred to as the average of a series.

The Education Trust is a nonprofit group that works to improve the quality of education for poor and minority children. Barth said those children are the most likely to be exposed to poorly trained teachers.

Most disturbing to the authors was that teachers are not required to demonstrate that they have a deep knowledge of key concepts, the kind of knowledge that enables teachers to help students attain a similar level of understanding. Instead, the licensing tests emphasize simple recall of facts and rote skills.

"Why should prospective teachers go to college if this is all they need to know?" asked Lynn Steen, a former president of the Mathematics Assn. of America and an advisor to the study.

Steen, a math professor at St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minn., said teachers must know far more than their students to answer their questions and be able to "think of different ways of presenting the material to different students."

He said states don't require prospective teachers to take enough math in college and the tests "don't guarantee they know anything either."

Officials of the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing disputed the report's conclusion that the tests for secondary school teachers are too easy. Candidates for teaching jobs who have completed a California-approved education-related program do not have to pass any test. Anyone with a college degree, however, can get a temporary permit by passing two tests of their knowledge of the subject they want to teach.

Dennis Tierney, director of professional services with the commission, said that only 40% of the test-takers passed one of the two tests in math and only 31% passed the other, even after several tries.

"We set the minimum standards," he said. "Obviously, we want teachers to know more than what the kids know. But, on the other hand, legally we need to be careful that the material we're demanding that they know be material they will need to know on the job."

The Education Trust report said that typical reading passages in the tests required of elementary school teachers were written on the level of National Geographic, which the study's authors said should be readily understood by students in the fifth and sixth grades.

The study criticized the tests for high school teachers in the language arts, saying that no questions require them to "show that they know how to do useful things with what they know."

The study's authors say such skills are critical, given that most states now have written student standards that emphasize the ability to apply one's knowledge to solve problems and to think and write analytically.

Many states waive even those minimal expectations in the event that they cannot readily find enough qualified candidates.

The report's authors recommend that, for elementary school teachers, states create tests that measure whether candidates have at least the general knowledge required of a four-year college liberal arts program. For high school teachers, the report recommends that states require passage of the most rigorous of the now-available tests.

In addition, the authors said, minimum passing scores should be raised and states should begin aligning licensing exams with academic standards for students.

But Barth said states will begin raising their requirements only if the public demands better qualified teachers.

"The only thing that's going to cut through . . . is if the public gives policymakers the backbone to say that we can't expect kids to meet high standards unless we expect teachers to meet high standards," she said.

Concern over the skills and performance of teachers has risen to the top of the education agenda nationally. Among the factors fueling that rise are a number of studies documenting the profound impact of individual teachers on the academic achievement of students. In addition, the nation is on the verge of hiring 2 million or more teachers, as a generation of classroom veterans approaches retirement and student enrollments swell.

A year ago, 59% of those taking the teacher licensing exam in Massachusetts failed to pass, which was seen nationwide as evidence that teachers were poorly prepared. In 1998, Virginia raised the passing score on its basic skills test and 35% of the applicants failed at least one of the three sections on the test.

Arthur E. Wise, president of the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, was skeptical of the new report's conclusions. Nevertheless, he agreed that "teachers must know their content and they also must know how to teach it."

Los Angeles Times, April 7, 1999,

CLASS-SIZE REDUCTION DOESN'T BENEFIT ALL

QUALITY TEACHERS GRAVITATE TO UPPER-INCOME SCHOOL DISTRICTS, WHILE INNER-CITY STUDENTS LOSE OUT.

BY RANDY ROSS

With great fanfare in 1996, California began spending more than $1 billion a year to reduce the size of classes in the early primary grades. Many schools in high-income communities have benefited measurably from the class-size reduction program. They had no inexperienced teachers before the introduction of the class-size reduction program, and they had none after. Yet, a wholesale reduction in class size nibbles away at the chances that students in poor inner-city neighborhoods will get a good education--even if fully qualified teachers were available to fill the new classrooms.

Here's why.

A substantive reduction in the size of classes in the lower grades for virtually every one of California's public elementary schools triggers a frenetic stirring among the existing teacher force. Schools post job openings for the newly created classrooms. Teachers apply to multiple sites, some more attractive than others. The more attractive schools--those in middle to high-income communities--receive stacks of applications along with well-honed cover letters. The least attractive schools--poorly performing schools in high poverty areas--scrape far fewer applications from their mailboxes.

Of the applicants who fail to make the cut for the plum teaching slots, some opt out of the teaching profession while many others, by default, repair to classrooms in the inner city. A 1984 Los Angeles Unified School District survey of about 2,000 Los Angeles teachers measured the extent of this smarting but natural dynamic. Teachers were asked how they felt about working in hard-to-staff schools--primarily schools in the high-poverty areas hit by the 1965 Watts riots. The widespread perception was that, in these schools, teachers were less safe and students were less prepared to learn and more difficult to discipline. Forty percent said they would resign if they were forced to take on such a tough assignment.

The California class-size reduction story is drearier. The state's rapidly rising K-12 enrollment, an aging teacher force and the inability of schools of education to keep up have combined to create a teacher shortage so gaping that inner-city school administrators laugh deliriously when admonished to cease hiring inexperienced and unprepared teachers.

Even before the class-size reduction program, for example, the Los Angeles Unified School District had begun to hire thousands of inexperienced teachers (primarily those with emergency credentials). The School Accountability Report Cards for LAUSD schools show that many poor, inner-city children are, indeed, being taught in smaller classes but by less-experienced teachers.

The precipitous rise in the number of inexperienced teachers is but one part of the dark side of the story of how class-size reduction lowers the quality of teaching in poor, inner-city neighborhoods. Stories are rife about classrooms in inner-city schools going without teachers during the year (they employ long-term substitutes).

Does it matter that California's class-size reduction program results in the redistribution of the quality of teachers? Yes. Poor teaching nullifies the potential benefits of smaller classes. A recent study of Dallas public schools suggests that spurts in academic performance take place only when students are exposed grade by grade to quality teaching. A single break in the quality stream causes the educational wheel to spin in place, digging a deeper and deeper hole for children.

What can be done to resolve this problem? Given that California (as well as the federal government) seems bent on adding more fuel to the stupendous class-size reduction locomotive, at minimum the state should figure out how to implement the program in ways that benefit all students--rich and poor.

One idea involves giving schools greater flexibility over how they implement the program. In lieu of creating smaller classes, a school could reduce its reliance on inexperienced teachers by using the same resources to hire one full-time, out-of-classroom super-mentor teacher for every four inexperienced teachers in a school. The focus would be on what to teach, how to teach it, how to assess what students learned and how to organize and manage a classroom.

On the face of it, the predictable redistribution of teaching quality fostered by California's class-size reduction program looks, smells and feels a lot like triage. The three-of-20 teachers who view the education of inner-city children as their calling need a lot more help than they have gotten in the past. And they certainly don't need policies that dampen their good work by ensuring that inner-city kids with certainty encounter some ineffective teachers along the way.

Randy Ross is vice president of the Los Angeles Annenberg Metropolitan Project.

New York Times, April 7, 1999

Dueling Goals for Education

By Arthur Levine

These days you can't run for public office, whether the city council or the United States Senate, without having an education plan. This phenomenon, especially noticeable in last fall's elections, has been evident in two recurring themes nationwide: the push to raise standards for teachers and the call to reduce class sizes.

Both of these ideas are excellent. The problem is that they clash, and if we don't plan carefully and quickly, we're likely to achieve neither.

In the next decade the nation will lose half of its four million public school teachers, largely through retirement, the United States Department of Education estimates. We are not educating enough new teachers to fill these jobs. Moreover, the population of school-age children is growing quickly — 12 percent in the past decade, with another 3 percent projected for the next decade. The need, then, is not simply to fill the existing teacher positions but to substantially increase the number of teachers.

Now add to this the notion of reducing class size. That is likely to require *another* 15 to 20 percent increase in the number of teachers. The bottom line is that reductions in class size, though very desirable, exacerbate the teacher shortage caused by retirements and the growing number of new students.

Then there's the second popular initiative, raising standards for teachers. A growing number of states are becoming more selective about who can enter the teaching profession. After a decade and a half of research showing clearly that teacher-certification requirements are too lenient and that too many teachers are unprepared to educate their students, raising the bar is imperative. But higher standards are very likely to mean shrinking numbers of teachers, since a smaller proportion of candidates will be able to meet the higher standards.

So the real danger we face in simultaneously pursuing higher teacher standards and smaller classes is that we will have a small but excellent corps of teachers who have met the raised standards but a growing number of classrooms that we will be forced to staff with any warm bodies we can find.

> Can we have smaller classes *and* better teachers?

Do we choose smaller classes or better teachers? The fact is we can have both and need both, but not if we continue to do business as usual. The states need to take three steps now.

First, they need to strengthen teacher education. The nation has too many weak education schools, with teachers, students and curriculums that are not up to the task at hand. Their students do not pass existing certification requirements in adequate numbers and will certainly not pass raised standards. It's time for government to strengthen or close these schools.

The second step is to improve financial incentives for entering the teaching profession. The graduate education necessary to earn a master's degree in teaching lasts nearly as long as that required for an M.B.A., yet those with M.B.A.'s earn starting salaries that are more than twice as high. Even when able, idealistic young people do enter the teaching profession, they are often drawn away by jobs with higher salaries and greater prestige.

To attract and keep the best teachers, the Federal and state governments will need to expand bonus programs for entering the field, loan-forgiveness programs and tax preferences. Above all, salaries for entering teachers must be raised significantly. In this regard, it is a sad mistake that Congressional Republicans recently voted down the Administration's financing proposal for recruiting new teachers.

The third step states must take is enlarging the pool of potential teachers. Because education schools cannot prepare enough teachers to fill the anticipated vacancies, it is essential to create the machinery to immediately recruit people who can fill these positions — retired teachers, people with teacher preparation or partial preparation who went into other professions, career changers in allied fields, full-time parents and paraprofessionals in education who are in need of additional schooling. More states need to establish programs tailored for these nontraditional recruits that will allow them to meet higher teacher standards.

Raising teacher certification standards and shrinking class size are among the few areas in which we can have our cake and eat it, too — but only if we act now. □

Arthur Levine is president of Teachers College, Columbia University.

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The Boston Globe, April 4, 1999

Class career moves

Doctoral candidate
Lexington High School biology and chemistry teacher Asher Davison

News photographer
Jeremiah E. Burke High School computer science teacher Wesley Williams Jr.

Graduate student
Newton North High School math teacher Leslie Gray

Attorney
R.J. Grey Junior High School English teacher Joan Lenington

Software designer
Framingham High School science teacher Derek Wilberg

GLOBE STAFF PHOTO/JOHN TLUMACKI

Teaching winning recruits

By Beth Daley
GLOBE STAFF

Asher Davison is a man with options.

A Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Yale, he attended Massachusetts Institute of Technology on a national fellowship for biology doctoral students.

Yet every school day for the last two years, the pony-tailed Davison has opted for a classroom in Lexington High School, teaching basic biology and chemistry instead of making his mark, and much more money, in the world of biochemical research.

Davison is one of an unusual number of new teachers in Massachusetts who either come from other careers or whose advanced degrees could command higher salaries in other fields. School superintendents and graduate schools of education say they are seeing nearly double the number of both midcareer professionals and new graduates with highly specialized degrees turning to teaching than they saw a decade ago.

In Framingham, close to 40 percent of the 350 teachers hired in the last five years came from other professions, said Donald McCallion, human resources director for the town's school system. Of the roughly 100 teachers McCallion has hired in the last year, almost all had master's degrees or better, some from top colleges, including Tufts and Harvard.

These unusually well-credentialed new teachers arrive at a critical time, as the state confronts the issue of the large number of teacher candidates from education schools who have failed the new certification test.

There will be a record 35,000 teachers retiring in Massachusetts over the next decade, and teaching colleges alone are not producing enough high-quality teachers to fill those vacancies. So school systems are eager to tap other teacher can-

TEACHERS, Page A12

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New faces, talents join teaching ranks

■ TEACHERS
Continued from Page A1

didates, particularly those with expertise in science, math, or foreign languages.

Joan Lenington, 47, just left her 17-year law practice to become an eighth-grade teacher in Acton.

"There was no magic moment; it was a long process," Lenington said of deciding to become a teacher. "It was tied to both a feeling of a lack of satisfaction in the long-range significance of my job and what I saw as the huge impact teaching had on children."

Like most midcareer professionals going into teaching, Lenington said it would have been impossible to do so if not for the booming economy and an "emotionally and financially" supportive spouse.

These professionals and top graduates say they are choosing teaching for several reasons. For example, the good economy gives new graduates confidence that higher-paying jobs await them if teaching doesn't work out. And the robust economy gives midcareer professionals a degree of financial freedom.

Also, top colleges, including several around Boston, are starting special programs to encourage more high-performing undergraduates to go into teaching, just as huge public attention is being paid to education.

Veteran teachers also describe a wave of idealism among the newcomers that they say reminds them of the 1960s.

"Many of these people can make a fortune in different fields, and they are choosing teaching. They all bring the desire to give young people the same opportunities they had, and they come with specific [talents]," said acting headmaster Cornelia Kelley of Boston Latin School. "I see it all the time lately, and it's wonderful."

Virginia Kerrigan, 29, saw her salary cut almost by half last year when she left her job working with start-up software companies to pursue teaching. She's working in Harvard's special events office while waiting to

> **'Many of these people can make a fortune in different fields, and they are choosing teaching.'**
>
> CORNELIA KELLEY
> *Boston Latin School*

High School, who is retiring this year. "And they are totally committed to helping kids."

They are newcomers like Desiré Greene, a 21-year-old MIT senior studying environmental engineering. Greene never gave teaching a thought until she worked with youngsters one summer who said they wanted to see more black teachers in their school. She now takes teacher education courses, along with classes in her major, at MIT.

"If you were blessed with whatever intelligence you have and you were just going to use it for self-gain, I just don't think that is fair," she said.

Greene's field is probably one of the lower-paying specialties at MIT, she says. Still, it can command $35,000 to $40,000 for graduates with a bachelor's degree. Greene could expect to make $30,000 in an urban school district her first year of teaching, but it will take years to get to $40,000.

MIT started its special program five years ago to lure math and science majors like Greene into teaching.

Now other colleges are attempting to follow that lead. In April, the Association of American Universities, representing the top 62 research universities in the country, plans to announce a program giving math and science majors the chance to earn a teaching certificate with their bachelor's degree. The colleges are also researching other ways to make teaching more attractive, such as student loan forgiveness.

Along with the push for better teachers, retention remains a big issue. Greene, like dozens of her peers interviewed by the Globe, conceded that these new teacher candidates don't view teaching as a lifelong career. This is in sharp contrast to those who entered teaching 30 years ago, when few left the profession, which is why so many are retiring in the next 10 years.

"I want to teach, but I just am interested in so many things," said Michael Ferraro, 19, a sophomore studying computer science at MIT.

Ferraro and many other students said they had high confidence in their fu-

Tomorrow's teachers

Wesley Williams Jr., 51

School: Jeremiah E. Burke High School, Boston. Computer teacher, grades 9-12.

Years teaching: 2.

Education: Master's in education, Cambridge and Harvard; in doctoral program for computer science at UMass-Boston.

Personal: Married with eight children, four who graduated from Boston public schools, two now enrolled.

Job History: News photographer for Channel 7; co-owner of Broadcast Video Productions.

Why teaching?: "I got used to filming kids in body bags. I realized I wanted to see a change. I tell these kids they need to tune into reality and they can excel at whatever they want to do. What greater gift in life can you do?"

Biggest reservation: "We need to find a better way to get the kids to discipline themselves, to take more personal responsibility."

Joan Lenington, 47

School: R.J. Grey Junior High School in Acton, part-time English teacher, eighth grade.

Years teaching: 1.

Education: Bachelor's in English, Tufts ; law degree, Northeastern; master's in teaching, Simmons.

Jobs Held: Attorney for 17 years.

Personal: Married; two children, ages 18 and 14.

Why teaching?: "I saw the effect good and bad teachers had on my own two children."

Biggest reservation: "Until you are in a classroom trying to teach upwards of 110 students a day, you can't appreciate the multiple skills teaching demands and the hours required to do the job well."

Leslie Gray, 26

School: Newton North High School, math teacher, grades 9, 11 and 12.

Year's teaching: 4.

Education: Bachelor's in math and music, Williams; master's in education, Harvard.

Personal: Single.

Why teaching?: "When I was at Williams,

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hear whether she's been accepted by its graduate school of education for a master's program in risk prevention.

"Some people do look at you funny. And a lot of people my age are making a hell of a lot more money," said Kerrigan. "But this is something I always wanted to do."

Indeed, half of the 120 finalists for the state's 50 new-teacher signing bonuses come from other careers, including a university professor and a producer for the children's television show, "Blue's Clues." The $20,000 bonuses are payable after four years of teaching.

Yet these new teachers with their great resumes – and the schools they enter – face immense challenges. The current turnover rate for teachers is high: nationally, 30 percent of all new teachers quit within the first five years, according to Recruiting New Teachers, a nonprofit group dedicated to expanding the teaching force nationwide.

New teachers can be disillusioned by a lack of public respect, support, and money. The more career options that new teachers have, the harder it may be for a school system to keep them.

While some systems, including Lexington and Northborough, are starting programs to support new teachers, such retention programs are still rare.

"We are calling for dramatic changes, and we may be getting good people," said Katherine Boles, a Brookline fourth-grade teacher who has taught for 22 years.

"But if they go in, they will take the $20,000 signing bonus and leave. The job will grind them down," predicts Boles, who is writing a book with her co-teacher, Vivian Troen, called, "If you are So Smart, Why Are You Still Teaching?"

Charlie McCarthy, principal of Arlington High School, says that while it is essential to convince talented new teachers to stay, it should not be taken for granted that someone from another profession will excel in the classroom.

"They may have a brilliant intellect, but it doesn't mean they can engage kids," McCarthy said. "Just because you have good credentials doesn't mean you're going to be a good teacher."

Indeed, Lexington High School asked two teachers with doctorates from MIT to leave in the last seven years because they simply weren't good teachers, officials there say.

But overall, the qualifications of these new teachers strike many old-timers as a vote of confidence in their field.

"I am so impressed with the quality of teachers coming in," said Andy Whelahan, the head of guidance for Wellesley

ture earning potential outsi[illegible]ching, a confidence that comes from having been schooled during the most prosperous American economy of this century. Ferraro, for instance, already earns money doing consulting.

Several midcareer professionals also said that the economy has given them a psychological freedom to try something new that they wouldn't have had in a less robust economy.

"It's becoming a more attractive field, in part because the economy is good and people feel free to try other things," said Wellesley's Whelahan.

But some educators worry about too many future teachers using school doors as career turnstiles. It can take a decade or longer just to learn how to teach well, they say.

"I know the new generation looks to teaching as a stepping stone, and I don't know how I feel about it," said Maurice Page, 52, a math teacher at Cambridge Rindge and Latin who has taught there since 1972 and says he has every intention of continuing. Page also instructs prospective teachers at MIT and Harvard.

"When we started teaching, it was something we were going to do for the long haul," he said. "I didn't become the teacher I am today because of the first five years of teaching."

If they are to stick with the job, new teachers say, there must be more room for career advancement. The advancement track in teaching tends to be painfully flat, compared to other professions. That's why new teachers with options are not likely to stay, many say.

Teaching salaries do need to increase, Davison says, but he has a different reason for planning to teach public school for only several years. Ultimately, he sees himself in educational research and academia, work that he passionately believes requires prior experience in a classroom.

After graduating from Yale with a degree in molecular biophysics and biochemistry, Davison's interest in teaching led him to defer the fellowship to MIT so that he could teach at Phillips Academy in Andover for a year. Davison eventually went to MIT to explore science research and earned a master's degree in biology.

"I don't feel all of the public genuinely esteems teaching," he said. "But it's a noble field, for anyone who chooses it. I consider it a great honor to be an educator, and I have tremendous respect for anyone that devotes their whole life to classroom teaching."

I worked with at-risk boys living in a correctional facility as a teacher's assistant. It was gratifying, challenging, and exciting."

Biggest reservation: "Most people are acknowledging that the teaching profession is a valuable one. But there still are murmurs of the 'if you can't do, you teach' philosophy."

Derek Wiberg, 38

School: Framingham High School science teacher, grades 9-12.

Years teaching: 4.

Education: Bachelor's in biology and computer science, State University of New York; master's in education, Harvard.

Job History: Software development at Massachusetts General Hospital; developed ATM network for Goldome Bank.

Personal: Married.

Why teaching?: "Sure, you take a pay cut. But you have all these open minds looking up at you. It's an amazing thing."

Biggest reservation: "A lot of teachers do good work, but more needs to be done to sustain them. There needs to be more support of teachers in their development, their education, their trade."

Judi Freeman, 41

School: Boston Latin, student-teacher of history and social studies, grades 7-12.

Education: Bachelor's in history of art, Vassar; master's in history of art, Johns Hopkins; master's in history of art, Yale; post-graduate work, Harvard and University of London; earning master's in teaching history.

Jobs Held: Independent museum curator; curator for Portland Museum of Art; curator for Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

Personal: Married; two children, ages 7 and 14.

Why teaching?: "As a parent, I see the enormous value in the strong relationships my children have with teachers. If you could take an awareness of how to present materials, and infuse it with the special relationships between really engaged teachers and students, I think education can be stronger and even revitalized."

Biggest reservation: "The amount of material needed to cover for the MCAS is going to make it difficult to explore material in depth."

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Selected Readings on School Reform

Curriculum and Content

John Bruer, in his superb article "In Search of . . . Brain-Based Education" in *Phi Delta Kappan*, takes on the education establishment for playing fast and loose with scientific research findings to fit its own pre-conceived notions. Specifically, Bruer questions such popular assumptions as the "educational significance of brain laterality" (right brain versus left brain) and the claim that neuroscience has established the existence of a "sensitive period" for learning in the earliest years.

Next up is Sandra Stotsky's critique of reading fads that diminish basic skills—such as phonics—in the name of multiculturalism. Writing in the *School Administrator*, Stotsky argues that it's a mistake for diversity goals to dominate reading instruction because it leads to such mistakes as including multiple foreign words in basal readers. Valuable time and mental energy are spent learning words students never use again.

Another curricular question under debate is when to introduce students to algebra. "Educators Square Off over Algebra," reads Jay Mathews's headline in the *Washington Post*. We know that students who take algebra in eighth grade are more likely to select serious math and science courses in high schools and then do well in college. Yet the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics and some principals, teachers, and parents are resisting this urge because of their fear that students who do poorly may damage their self-esteem and lose interest in math altogether. (Strange logic if you ask us.)

Concern about self-esteem reappears in the disappearing valedictorian. More and more high schools and colleges are thinking twice before assigning class rank. Complex calculations cause hurt feelings and spawn lawsuits, explains Lawrence Muhammed in his *USA TODAY* article "Schools Devalue the Drive to Be Valedictorian." Can we no longer honor someone who does better than others?

DDW

Phi Delta Kappan, May 1999

In Search of . . . Brain-Based Education

By John T. Bruer

The "In Search of . . ." television series is no way to present history, Mr. Bruer points out, and the brain-based education literature is not the way to present the science of learning.

WE HAVE almost survived the Decade of the Brain. During the 1990s, government agencies, foundations, and advocacy groups engaged in a highly successful effort to raise public awareness about advances in brain research. Brain science became material for cover stories in our national newsmagazines. Increased public awareness raised educators' always simmering interest in the brain to the boiling point. Over the past five years, there have been numerous books, conferences, and entire issues of education journals devoted to what has come to be called "brain-based education."

Brain-based educators tend to support progressive education reforms. They decry the "factory model of education," in which experts create knowledge, teachers disseminate it, and students are graded on how much of it they can absorb and retain. Like many other educators, brain-based educators favor a constructivist, active learning model. Students should be actively engaged in learning and in guiding their own instruction. Brain enthusiasts see neuroscience as perhaps the best weapon with which to destroy our outdated factory model.[1] They argue that teachers should teach for meaning and understanding. To do so, they claim, teachers should create learning environments that are low in threat and high in challenge, and students should be actively engaged and immersed in complex experiences. No reasonable parent or informed educator would take issue with these ideas. Indeed, if more schools taught for understanding and if more teachers had the resources to do so, our schools would be better learning environments.

However, there is nothing new in this critique of traditional education. It is based on a cognitive and constructivist model of learning that is firmly rooted in more than 30 years of psychological research. Whatever scientific evidence we have for or against the efficacy of such educational approaches can be found in any current textbook on educational psychology.[2] None of the evidence comes from brain research. It comes from cognitive and developmental psychology; from the behavioral, not the biological, sciences; from our scientific understanding of the mind, not from our scientific understanding of the brain.

To the extent that brain-based educators' recipe for school and classroom change is well grounded in this behavioral research, their message is valuable. Teachers should know about short- and long-term memory; about primacy/recency effects;

THE DANGER WITH MUCH OF THE BRAIN-BASED EDUCATION LITERATURE IS THAT IT BECOMES EXCEEDINGLY DIFFICULT TO SEPARATE THE SCIENCE FROM THE SPECULATION.

about how procedural, declarative, and episodic memory differ; and about how prior knowledge affects our current ability to learn. But to claim that these are "brain-based" findings is misleading.

While we know a considerable amount from psychological research that is pertinent to teaching and learning, we know much less about how the brain functions and learns.[3] For nearly a century, the science of the mind (psychology) developed independently from the science of the brain (neuroscience). Psychologists were interested in our mental functions and capacities — how we learn, remember, and think. Neuroscientists were interested in how the brain develops and functions. It was as if psychologists were interested only in our mental software and neuroscientists only in our neural hardware. Deeply held theoretical assumptions in both fields supported a view that mind and brain could, and indeed should, be studied independently.

It is only in the past 15 years or so that these theoretical barriers have fallen. Now scientists called cognitive neuroscientists are beginning to study how our neural hardware might run our mental software, how brain structures support mental functions, how our neural circuits enable us to think and learn. This is an exciting and new scientific endeavor, but it is also a very young one. As a result we know relatively little about learning, thinking, and remembering at the level of brain areas, neural circuits, or synapses; we know very little about how the brain thinks, remembers, and learns.

Yet brain science has always had a seductive appeal for educators.[4] Brain science appears to give hard biological data and explanations that, for some reason, we find more compelling than the "soft" data that come from psychological science. But seductive appeal and a very limited brain science database are a dangerous combination. They make it relatively easy to formulate bold statements about brain science and education that are speculative at best and often far removed from neuroscientific fact. Nonetheless, the allure of brain science ensures that these ideas will often find a substantial and accepting audience. As Joseph LeDoux, a leading authority on the neuroscience of emotion, cautioned educators at a 1996 brain and education conference, "These ideas are easy to sell to the public, but it is easy to take them beyond their actual basis in science."[5]

And the ideas are far-ranging indeed. Within the literature on the brain and education one finds, for example, that brain science supports Bloom's Taxonomy, Madeline Hunter's effective teaching, whole-language instruction, Vygotsky's theory of social learning, thematic instruction, portfolio assessment, and cooperative learning.

The difficulty is that the brain-based education literature is very much like a docudrama or an episode of "In Search of . . ." in which an interesting segment on Egyptology suddenly takes a bizarre turn that links Tutankhamen with the alien landing in Roswell, New Mexico. Just where did the episode turn from archaeological fact to speculation or fantasy? That is the same question one must constantly ask when reading about brain-based education.

Educators, like all professionals, should be interested in knowing how basic research, including brain science, might contribute to improved professional practice. The danger with much of the brain-based education literature, as with an "In Search of . . ." episode, is that it becomes exceedingly difficult to separate the science from the speculation, to sort what we know from what we would like to be the case. If our interest is enhancing teaching and learning by applying science to education, this is not the way to do it. Would we want our children to learn about the Exodus by watching "In Search of Ramses' Martian Wife"?

We might think of each of the numerous claims that brain-based educators make as similar to an "In Search of . . ." episode. For each one, we should ask, Where does the science end and the speculation begin? I cannot do that here. So instead I'll concentrate on two ideas that appear prominently in brain-based education articles: the educational significance of brain laterality (right brain versus left brain) and the claim that neuroscience has established that there is a sensitive period for learning.

Left Brain, Right Brain: One More Time

"Right brain versus left brain" is one of those popular ideas that will not die. Speculations about the educational significance of brain laterality have been circulating in the education literature for 30 years. Although repeatedly criticized and dismissed by psychologists and brain scientists, the speculation continues.[6] David Sousa devotes a chapter of *How the Brain Learns* to explaining brain laterality and presents classroom strategies that teachers might use to ensure that both hemispheres are involved in learning.[7] Following the standard line, the *left hemisphere* is the logical hemisphere, involved in speech, reading, and writing. It is the analytical hemisphere that evaluates factual material in a rational way and that understands the literal interpretation of words. It is a serial processor that tracks time and sequences and that recognizes words, letters, and numbers. The *right hemisphere* is the intuitive, creative hemisphere. It gathers information more from images than from words. It is a parallel processor well suited for pattern recognition and spatial reasoning. It is the hemisphere that recognizes faces, places, and objects.

According to this traditional view of laterality, left-hemisphere-dominant individuals tend to be more verbal, more ana-

lytical, and better problem solvers. Females, we are told, are more likely than males to be left-hemisphere dominant. Right-hemisphere-dominant individuals, more typically males, paint and draw well, are good at math, and deal with the visual world more easily than with the verbal. Schools, Sousa points out, are overwhelmingly left-hemisphere places in which left-hemisphere-dominant individuals, mostly girls, feel more comfortable than right-hemisphere-dominant individuals, mostly boys. Hemispheric dominance also explains why girls are superior to boys in arithmetic — it is linear and logical, and there is only one correct answer to each problem — while girls suffer math anxiety when it comes to the right-hemisphere activities of algebra and geometry. These latter disciplines, unlike arithmetic, are holistic, relational, and spatial and also allow multiple solutions to problems.

Before we consider how, or whether, brain science supports this traditional view, educators should be wary of claims about the educational significance of gender differences in brain laterality. There are tasks that psychologists have used in their studies that reveal gender-based differences in performance. Often, however, these differences are specific to a task. Although males are superior to females at mentally rotating objects, this seems to be the only spatial task for which psychologists have found such a difference.[8] Moreover, when they do find gender differences, these differences tend to be very small. If they were measured on an I.Q.-like scale with a mean of 100 and a standard deviation of 15, these gender differences amount to around five points. Furthermore, the range of difference within genders is broad. Many males have better language skills than most females; many females have better spatial and mathematical skills than most males. The scientific consensus among psychologists and neuroscientists who conduct these studies is that whatever gender differences exist may have interesting consequences for the scientific study of the brain, but they have no practical or instructional consequences.[9]

Now let's consider the brain sciences and how or whether they offer support for some of the particular teaching strategies Sousa recommends. To involve the right hemisphere in learning, Sousa writes, teachers should encourage students to generate and use mental imagery: "For most people, the left hemisphere specializes in coding information verbally while the right hemisphere codes information visually. Although teachers spend much time talking (and sometimes have their students talk) about the learning objective, little time is given to developing visual cues." To ensure that the left hemisphere gets equal time, teachers should let students "read, write, and compute often."[10]

What brain scientists currently know about spatial reasoning and mental imagery provides counterexamples to such simplistic claims as these. Such claims arise out of a folk theory about brain laterality, not a neuroscientific one.

Here are two simple spatial tasks: 1) determine whether one object is above or below another, and 2) determine whether two objects are more or less than one foot apart. Based on our folk theory of the brain, as spatial tasks both of these should be right-hemisphere tasks. However, if we delve a little deeper, as psychologists and neuroscientists tend to do, we see that the information-processing or computational demands of the two tasks are different.[11] The first task requires that we place objects or parts of objects into broad categories — up/down or left/right — but we do not have to determine how far up or down (or left or right) one object is from the other. Psychologists call this *categorical* spatial reasoning. In contrast, the second task is a spatial *coordinate* task, in which we must compute and retain precise distance relations between the objects.

Research over the last decade has shown that categorical and coordinate spatial reasoning are performed by distinct subsystems in the brain.[12] A subsystem in the brain's *left* hemisphere performs categorical spatial reasoning. A subsystem in the brain's *right* hemisphere processes coordinate spatial relationships. Although the research does point to differences in the information-processing abilities and biases of the brain hemispheres, those differences are found at a finer level of analysis than "spatial reasoning." It makes no sense to claim that spatial reasoning is a right-hemisphere task.

Based on research like this, Christopher Chabris and Stephen Kosslyn, leading researchers in the field of spatial reasoning and visual imagery, claim that any model of brain lateralization that assigns conglomerations of complex mental abilities, such as spatial reasoning, to one hemisphere or the other, as our folk theory does, is simply too crude to be scientifically or practically useful. Our folk theory can neither explain what the brain is doing nor generate useful predictions about where novel tasks might be computed in the brain.[13] Unfortunately, it is just such a crude folk theory that brain-based educators rely on when framing their recommendations.

Visual imagery is another example. From the traditional, folk-theoretic perspective, generating and using visual imagery is a right-hemisphere function. Generating and using visual imagery is a complex operation that involves, even at a crude level of analysis, at least five distinct mental subcomponents: 1) to create a visual image of a dog, you must transfer long-term visual memories into a temporary visual memory store; 2) to determine if your imagined dog has a tail, you must zoom in and identify details of the image; 3) to put a blue collar on the dog requires that you add a new element to your previously generated image; 4) to make the dog look the other way demands that you rotate your image of the dog; and 5) to draw or describe the imagined dog, you must scan the visual image with your mind's eye.

There is an abundance of neuroscientific evidence that this complex task is not confined to the right hemisphere. There are patients with brain damage who can recognize visual objects and draw or describe visible objects normally, yet these patients cannot answer questions that require them to generate a mental image. ("Think of a dog. Does it have a long tail?") These patients have long-term visual memories, but they cannot use those memories to generate mental images. All these patients have damage to the rear portion of the left hemisphere.[14]

Studies on split-brain patients, people who have had their two hemispheres surgically disconnected to treat severe epilepsy, allow scientists to present visual stimuli to one hemisphere but not the other. Michael Gazzaniga and Kosslyn showed split-brain patients a lower-case letter and then asked the patients whether the corresponding capital letter had any curved lines.[15] The task required that the patients generate a mental image of the capital letter based on the lower-case letter they had seen. When the stimuli were presented to the patients' left hemispheres, they performed perfectly on the task. However, the patients made many mistakes when the letter stimuli were presented to the right hemisphere. Likewise, brain-imaging studies of normal adult subjects performing image-

ry tasks show that both hemispheres are active in these tasks.[16] Based on all these data, brain scientists have concluded that the ability to generate visual imagery depends on the left hemisphere.

One of the most accessible presentations of this research appears in *Images of Mind*, by Michael Posner and Mark Raichle, in which they conclude, "The common belief that creating mental imagery is a function of the right hemisphere is clearly false."[17] Again, different brain areas are specialized for different tasks, but that specialization occurs at a finer level of analysis than "using visual imagery." Using visual imagery may be a useful learning strategy, but if it is useful it is not because it involves an otherwise underutilized right hemisphere in learning.

The same problem also subverts claims that one hemisphere or the other is the site of number recognition or reading skills. Here is a simple number task, expressed in two apparently equivalent ways: What is bigger, two or five? What is bigger, 2 or 5? It involves recognizing number symbols and understanding what those symbols mean. According to our folk theory, this should be a left-hemisphere task. But once again our folk theory is too crude.

Numerical comparison involves at least two mental subskills: identifying the number names and then comparing the numerical magnitudes that they designate. Although we seldom think of it, we are "bilingual" when it comes to numbers. We have number words — e.g., *one*, *two* — to name numbers, and we also have special written symbols, Arabic numerals — e.g., *1*, *2*. Our numerical bilingualism means that the two comparison questions above place different computational demands on the mind/brain. Using brain-recording techniques, Stanislaus Dehaene found that we identify number words using a system in the brain's left hemisphere, but we identify Arabic numerals using brain areas in both the right and left hemispheres. Once we identify either the number words or the Arabic digits as symbols for numerical quantities, a distinct neural subsystem in the brain's right hemisphere compares magnitudes named by the two number symbols.[18]

Even for such a simple number task as comparison, both hemispheres are involved. Thus it makes no neuroscientific sense to claim that the left hemisphere recognizes numbers. Brain areas are specialized, but at a much finer level than "recognizing numbers." This simple task is already too complex for our folk theory to handle. Forget about algebra and geometry.

THE FUNDAMENTAL PROBLEM WITH THE RIGHT-BRAIN VERSUS LEFT-BRAIN CLAIMS IN THE EDUCATION LITERATURE IS THAT THEY RELY ON INTUITIONS AND FOLK THEORIES ABOUT THE BRAIN.

Similar research that analyzes speech and reading skills into their component processes also shows that reading is not simply a left-hemisphere task, as our folk theory suggests. Recognizing speech sounds, decoding written words, finding the meanings of words, constructing the gist of a written text, and making inferences as we read all rely on subsystems in both brain hemispheres.[19]

There is another different, but equally misleading, interpretation of brain laterality that occurs in the literature of brain-based education. In *Making Connections*, Renate Caine and Geoffrey Caine are critical of traditional "brain dichotomizers" and warn that the brain does not lend itself to such simple explanations. In their view, the results of research on split brains and hemispheric specialization are inconclusive — "both hemispheres are involved in all activities" — a conclusion that would seem to be consistent with what we have seen in our brief review of spatial reasoning, visual imagery, number skills, and reading.

However, following the folk theory, they do maintain that the left hemisphere processes parts and the right hemisphere processes wholes. In their interpretation, the educational significance of laterality research is that it shows that, within the brain, parts and wholes always interact. Laterality research thus provides scientific support for one of their principles of brain-based education: the brain processes parts and wholes simultaneously. Rather than number comparison or categorical spatial reasoning, the Caines provide a more global example: "Consider a poem, a play, a great novel, or a great work of philosophy. They all involve a sense of the 'wholeness' of things and a capacity to work with patterns, often in timeless ways. In other words, the 'left brain' processes are enriched and supported by 'right brain' processes."[20]

For educators, the Caines see the two-brain doctrine as a "valuable metaphor that helps educators acknowledge two separate but simultaneous tendencies in the brain for organizing information. One is to reduce information to parts; the other is to perceive and work with it as a whole or a series of wholes."[21] Effective brain-based educational strategies overlook neither parts nor wholes, but constantly attempt to provide opportunities in which students can make connections and integrate parts and wholes. Thus the Caines number among their examples of brain-based approaches whole-language instruction,[22] integrated curricula, thematic teaching, and cooperative learning.[23] Similarly, because we make connections best when new information is embedded in meaningful life events and in socially interactive situations, Lev Vygotsky's theory of social learning should also be highly brain compatible.[24]

To the extent that one would want to view this as a metaphor, all I can say is that some of us find some metaphors more appealing than others. To the extent that this is supposed to be an attempt to ground educational principles in brain science, the

aliens have just landed in Egypt.

Where did things go awry? Although they claim that laterality research in the sense of hemispheric localization is inconclusive, the Caines do maintain the piece of our folk theory that attributes "whole" processing to the right hemisphere and "part" processing to the left hemisphere. Because the two hemispheres are connected in normal healthy brains, they conclude that the brain processes parts and wholes simultaneously. It certainly does — although it probably is not the case that wholes and parts can be so neatly dichotomized. For example, in visual word decoding, the right hemisphere seems to read words letter by letter — by looking at the parts — while the left hemisphere recognizes entire words — the visual word forms.[25]

But again, the parts and wholes to which the brain is sensitive appear to occur at quite a fine-grained level of analysis — categories versus coordinates, generating versus scanning visual images, identifying number words versus Arabic digits. The Caines' example of part/whole interactions — the left-hemisphere comprehension of a text and the right-hemisphere appreciation of wholeness — relates to such a highly complex task that involves so many parts and wholes at different levels of analysis that it is trivially true that the whole brain is involved. Thus their appeal to brain science suffers from the same problem Kosslyn identified in the attempts to use crude theories to understand the brain. The only brain categories that the Caines appeal to are parts and wholes. Then they attempt to understand learning and exceedingly complex tasks in terms of parts and wholes. This approach bothers neither to analyze the brain nor to analyze behaviors.

The danger here is that one might think that there are brain-based reasons to adopt whole-language instruction, integrated curricula, or Vygotskian social learning. There are none. Whether or not these educational practices should be adopted must be determined on the basis of the impact they have on student learning. The evidence we now have on whole-language instruction is at best inconclusive, and the efficacy of social learning theory remains an open question. Brain science contributes no evidence, pro or con, for the brain-based strategies that the Caines espouse.

The fundamental problem with the right-brain versus left-brain claims that one finds in the education literature is that they rely on our intuitions and folk theories about the brain, rather than on what brain science is actually able to tell us. Our folk theories are too crude and imprecise to have any scientific, predictive, or instructional value. What modern brain science is telling us — and what brain-based educators fail to appreciate — is that it makes no scientific sense to map gross, unanalyzed behaviors and skills — reading, arithmetic, spatial reasoning — onto one brain hemisphere or another.

Brains Like Sponges: The Sensitive Period

A new and popular, but problematic, idea found in the brain-based literature is that there is a critical or sensitive period in brain development, lasting until a child is around 10 years old, during which children learn faster, easier, and with more meaning than at any other time in their lives. David Sousa presented the claim this way in a recent commentary in *Education Week*, titled "Is the Fuss About Brain Research Justified?"

> As the child grows, the brain selectively strengthens and prunes connections based on experience. Although this process continues throughout our lives, it seems to be most pronounced between the ages of 2 and 11, as different development areas emerge and taper off. . . . These so-called "windows of opportunity" represent critical periods when the brain demands certain types of input to create or consolidate neural networks, especially for acquiring language, emotional control, and learning to play music. Certainly, one can learn new information and skills at any age. But what the child learns during that window period will strongly influence what is learned after the window closes.[26]

In a recent *Educational Leadership* article, Pat Wolfe and Ron Brandt prudently caution educators against any quick marriage between brain science and education. However, among the well-established neuroscientific findings about which educators can be confident, they include, "Some abilities are acquired more easily during certain sensitive periods, or 'windows of opportunity.'" Later they continue, "During these years, [the brain] also has a remarkable ability to adapt and reorganize. It appears to develop some capacities with more ease at this time than in the years after puberty. These stages once called 'critical periods' are more accurately described as 'sensitive periods' or 'windows of opportunity.'"[27] Eric Jensen, in *Teaching with the Brain in Mind*, also writes that "the brain learns fastest and easiest during the school years."[28]

If there were neuroscientific evidence for the existence of such a sensitive period, such evidence might appear to provide a biological argument for the importance of elementary teaching and a scientific rationale for redirecting resources, restructuring curricula, and reforming pedagogy to take advantage of the once-in-a-lifetime learning opportunity nature has given us. If teachers could understand when sensitive periods begin and end, the thinking goes, they could structure curricula to take advantage of these unique windows of opportunity. Sousa tells of an experienced fifth-grade teacher who was upset when a mother asked the teacher what she was doing to take advantage of her daughter's windows of opportunity before they closed. Unfortunately, according to Sousa, the teacher was unaware of the windows-of-opportunity research. He warns, "As the public learns more about brain research through the popular press, scenes like this are destined to be repeated, further eroding confidence in teachers and in schools."[29]

This well-established neuroscientific "finding" about a sensitive period for learning originated in the popular press and in advocacy documents. It is an instance where neuroscientists have speculated about the implications of their work for education and where educators have uncritically embraced that speculation. Presenting speculation as fact poses a greater threat to the public's confidence in teachers and schools than does Sousa's fifth-grade teacher.

During 1993, the *Chicago Tribune* ran Ron Kotulak's series of Pulitzer-Prize-winning articles on the new brain science. Kotulak's articles later appeared as a book titled *Inside the Brain: Revolutionary Discoveries of How the Mind Works*. Kotulak, an esteemed science writer, presented the first explicit statement that I have been able to find on the existence of a sensitive period between ages 4 and 10, during which children's brains learn fastest and easiest.[30] Variations on the claim appear in the Carnegie Corporation of New York's 1996 publication, *Years of Promise: A Comprehensive Learning Strategy for America's Children*, and in *Building Knowledge for a Nation of Learners*, published by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement of the U.S. Department of Education.[31]

A report released in conjunction with the April 1997 White House Conference on Early Brain Development stated, "[B]y the age of three, the brains of children are two and a half times more active than the brains of adults — and they stay that way throughout the first decade of life. . . . This suggests that young children — particularly infants and toddlers — are biologically primed for learning and that these early years provide a unique window of opportunity or prime time for learning.[32]

If the sensitive period from age 4 to age 10 is a finding about which educators can be confident and one that justifies the current fuss about brain science, we would expect to find an extensive body of neuroscientific research that supports the claim. Surprisingly, brain-based enthusiasts appeal to a very limited body of evidence.

In Kotulak's initial statement of the sensitive-period claim, he refers to the brain-imaging work of Dr. Harry Chugani, M.D., at Wayne State University: "Chugani, whose imaging studies revealed that children's brains learned fastest and easiest between the ages of 4 and 10, said these years are often wasted because of lack of input."[33]

Years of Promise, the Carnegie Corporation report, cites a speech Kotulak presented at a conference on Brain Development in Young Children, held at the University of Chicago on 13 June 1996. Again referring to Chugani's work, Kotulak said that the years from 4 to about 10 "are the wonder years of learning, when a child can easily pick up a foreign language without an accent and learn a musical instrument with ease."[34] *Years of Promise* also cites a review article published by Dr. Chugani that is based on remarks he made at that Chicago conference.[35] *Rethinking the Brain*, a report based on the Chicago conference, also cites the same sources, as does the U.S. Department of Education document. What's more, Wolfe, Brandt, and Jensen also cite Chugani's work in their discussions of the sensitive period for learning.

A 1996 article on education and the brain that appeared in *Education Week* reported, "By age 4, Chugani found, a child's brain uses more than twice the glucose that an adult brain uses. Between the ages 4 and 10, the amount of glucose a child's brain uses remains relatively stable. But by age 10, glucose utilization begins to drop off until it reaches adult levels at age 16 or 17. Chugani's findings suggest that a child's peak learning years occur just as all those synapses are forming."[36]

To be fair, these educators are not misrepresenting Chugani's views. He has often been quoted on the existence and educational importance of the sensitive period from age 4 until age 10.[37] In a review of his own work, published in *Preventive Medicine*, Chugani wrote:

> The notion of an extended period during childhood when activity-dependent [synapse] stabilization occurs has recently received considerable attention by those individuals and organizations dealing with early intervention to provide "environmental enrichment" and with the optimal design of educational curricula. Thus, it is now believed by many (including this author) that the biological "window of opportunity" when learning is efficient and easily retained is perhaps not fully exploited by our educational system.[38]

Oddly, none of these articles and reports cite the single research article that provides the experimental evidence that originally motivated the claim: a 1987 *Annals of Neurology* article.[39] In that 1987 article, Chugani and his colleagues, M. E. Phelps and J. C. Mazziota, report results of PET (positron emission tomography) scans on 29 epileptic children, ranging in age from five days to 15 years. Because PET scans require the injection of radioactive substances, physicians can scan children only for diagnostic and therapeutic purposes; they cannot scan "normal, healthy" children just out of scientific curiosity. Thus the 1987 study is an extremely important one because it was the first, if not the only, imaging study that attempted to trace brain development from infancy through adolescence.

The scientists administered radioactively labeled glucose to the children and used PET scans to measure the rate at which specific brain areas took up the glucose. The assumption is that areas of the brain that are more active require more energy and so will take up more of the glucose. While the scans were being acquired, the scientists made every effort to eliminate, or at least minimize, all sensory stimulation for the subjects. Thus they measured the rate of glucose uptake when the brain was (presumably) not engaged in any sensory or cognitive processing. That is, they measured resting brain-glucose metabolism.

One of their major findings was that, in all the brain areas they examined, metabolic levels reached adult values when children were approximately 2 years old and continued to increase, reaching rates twice the adult level by age 3 or 4. Resting glucose uptake remained at this elevated level until the children were around 9 years old. At age 9, the rates of brain glucose metabolism started to decline and stabilized at adult values by the end of the teenage years. What the researchers found, then, was a "high plateau" period for metabolic activity in the brain that lasted from roughly age 3 to age 9.

What is the significance of this high plateau period? To interpret their findings, Chugani and his colleagues relied on earlier research in which brain scientists had counted synapses in samples of human brain tissue to determine how the number and density of synaptic connections change in the human brain over our life spans. In the late 1970s, Peter Huttenlocher of the University of Chicago found that, starting a few months after birth and continuing until age 3, various parts of the brain formed synapses very rapidly.[40] This early, exuberant synapse growth resulted in synaptic densities in young children's brains that were 50% higher than the densities in mature adult brains. In humans, synaptic densities appear to remain at these elevated levels until around puberty, when some mechanism that is apparently under genetic control causes synapses to be eliminated or pruned back to the lower adult levels.

With this background, Chugani and his colleagues reasoned as follows. There is other evidence suggesting that maintaining synapses and their associated neural structures accounts for most of the glucose that the brain consumes. Their PET study measured changes in the brain's glucose consumption over the life span. Therefore, they reasoned, as the density and number of synapses wax and wane, so too does the rate of brain-glucose metabolism. This 1987 PET study provides important indirect evidence about brain development, based on the study of living brains, that corroborates the direct evidence based on counting synapses in samples of brain tissue taken from patients at autopsy. In the original paper, the scientists stated an important conclusion: "Our findings support the commonly accepted view that brain maturation in humans proceeds at least into the second decade of life."[41]

However, if you read the 1987 paper by Chugani, Phelps, and Mazziota, you

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NEITHER CHUGANI, HIS CO-AUTHORS, NOR OTHER NEUROSCIENTISTS HAVE STUDIED HOW QUICKLY OR EASILY 5-YEAR-OLDS LEARN AS OPPOSED TO 15-YEAR-OLDS.

will not find a section titled "The Relationship of Elevated Brain Metabolism and Synaptic Densities to Learning." Neither Chugani nor any of his co-authors have studied how quickly or easily 5-year-olds learn as opposed to 15-year-olds. Nor have other neuroscientists studied what high synaptic densities or high brain energy consumption means for the ease, rapidity, and depth of learning.

To connect high brain metabolism or excessive synaptic density with a critical period for learning requires some fancy footwork — or maybe more accurately, sleight of hand. We know that from early childhood until around age 10, children have extra or redundant synaptic connections in their brains. So, the reasoning goes, during this high plateau period of excess brain connectivity, "the individual is given the opportunity to retain and increase the efficiency of connections that, through repeated use during a critical period, are deemed to be important, whereas connections that are used to a lesser extent are more susceptible to being eliminated."[42] This, of course, is simply to assume that the high plateau period is a critical period.

Linking the critical period with learning requires an implicit appeal to another folk belief that appears throughout the history of the brain in education literature. This common assumption is that periods of rapid brain growth or high activity are optimal times, sensitive periods, or windows of opportunity for learning.[43] We get from Chugani's important brain-imaging results to a critical period for learning via two assumptions, neither of which is supported by neuroscientific data, and neither of which has even been the object of neuroscientific research. The claim that the period of high brain connectivity is a critical period for learning, far from being a neuroscientific finding about which educators can be confident, is at best neuroscientific speculation.

Chugani accurately described the scientific state of affairs in his *Preventive Medicine* review. He *believes*, along with some educators and early childhood advocates, that there is a biological window of opportunity when learning is easy, efficient, and easily retained. But there is no neuroscientific evidence to support this belief. And where there is no scientific evidence, there is no scientific fact.

Furthermore, it would appear that we have a considerable amount of research ahead of us if we are to amass the evidence for or against this belief. Neuroscientists have little idea of how experience before puberty affects either the timing or the extent of synaptic elimination. While they have documented that the pruning of synapses does occur, no reliable studies have compared differences in final adult synaptic connectivity with differences in the experiences of individuals before puberty. Nor do they know whether the animals or individuals with greater synaptic densities in adulthood are necessarily more intelligent and developed. Neuroscientists do not know if prior training and education affect either loss or retention of synapses at puberty.[44]

Nor do neuroscientists know how learning is related to changes in brain metabolism and synaptic connectivity over our lifetimes. As the developmental neurobiologist Patricia Goldman-Rakic told educators, "While children's brains acquire a tremendous amount of information during the early years, most learning takes place after synaptic formation stabilizes."[45] That is, a great deal, if not most, learning takes place after age 10 and after pruning has occurred. If so, we may turn into efficient general learning machines only after puberty, only after synaptic formation stabilizes and our brains are less active.

Finally, the entire discussion of this purported critical period takes place under an implicit assumption that children actually do learn faster, more easily, and more deeply between the ages of 4 and 10. There are certainly critical periods for the development of species-wide skills, such as seeing, hearing, and acquiring a first language, but critical periods are interesting to psychologists because they seem to be the exception rather than the rule in human development. As Jacqueline Johnson and Elissa Newport remind us in their article on critical periods in language learning, "In most domains of learning, skill increases over development."[46]

When we ask whether children actually do learn more easily and meaningfully than adults, the answers we get are usually anecdotes about athletes, musicians, and students of second languages. We have not begun to look at the rate, efficiency, and depth of learning across various age groups in a representative sample of learning domains. We are making an assumption about learning behavior and then relying on highly speculative brain science to explain our assumption. We have a lot more research to do.

So, despite what you read in the papers and in the brain-based education literature, neuroscience has *not* established that there is a sensitive period between the ages of 4 and 10 during which children learn more quickly, easily, and meaningfully. Brain-based educators have uncritically embraced neuroscientific speculation.

The pyramids were built by aliens — to house Elvis.

A February 1996 article in *Newsweek* on the brain and education quoted Linda Darling-Hammond: "Our school system was invented in the late 1800s, and little has changed. Can you imagine if the medical profession ran this way?"[47] Darling-Hammond is right. Our school system must change to reflect what we now know about teaching, learning, mind, and brain. To the extent that we want education to be a research-based enterprise, the medical pro-

fession provides a reasonable model. We can only be thankful that members of the medical profession are more careful in applying biological research to their professional practice than some educators are in applying brain research to theirs.

We should not shrug off this problem. It is symptomatic of some deeper problems about how research is presented to educators, about what educators find compelling, about how educators evaluate research, and about how professional development time and dollars are spent. The "In Search of . . ." series is a television program that provides an entertaining mix of fact, fiction, and fantasy. That can be an amusing exercise, but it is not always instructive. The brain-based education literature represents a genre of writing, most often appearing in professional education publications, that provides a popular mix of fact, misinterpretation, and speculation. That can be intriguing, but it is not always informative. "In Search of . . ." is no way to present history, and the brain-based education literature is not the way to present the science of learning.

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School Administrator, May 1999

Multicultural Literacy

Schools' treatment of diversity places students into categories and applies ineffectual learning methods to these stereotypes

By SANDRA STOTSKY

The meaning of the word "diversity" has been badly abused in recent decades. American educators have long honored diversity in the only educationally meaningful sense of the word--individual difference.

For generations teachers were trained to look at students as individuals. Each student was supposedly endowed with a different combination of talents, abilities, interests and opinions. There is no question that this way of understanding diversity created strong positive educational outcomes and could continue to do so. Intellectual or social conformity has never been an American trait.

But in an Orwellian transformation of the meaning of the word, diversity has come to mean looking at a student as a representative of a particular demographic category. It now conveys the erroneous notion that, for example, all girls think and learn in one way, all boys in another or that all black students think and learn in one way, all Asians in another, all white students in yet another. To see students as members of a particular racial category or "culture" (to use current educational jargon), rather than as unique individuals, makes all the difference in the world.

Few positive outcomes are possible in an educational system that slots all students into spurious racial categories and then attaches fictitious ways of thinking, learning and knowing to each. The result is not the elimination of stereotypes but the freezing of them.

Classified by Category We always have had different races and ethnic groups in our schools, although not in the same numbers or kinds in all schools. I grew up in a small Massachusetts town in which the children or grandchildren of early 20th century immigrants were as numerous as the children of those whose families had lived in the town for several hundred years.

As children, we all knew each others' backgrounds. We knew who spoke Italian, Armenian, Greek, Portuguese, Lithuanian, Polish or French Canadian in their home. We knew which families attended the local Catholic church, one of the many Protestant churches in town or the synagogue in a neighboring city. But not one of my teachers, in my presence, ever denigrated our ethnic, linguistic or religious backgrounds. Indeed, what they emphasized was something all our parents wanted them to stress. All of us, we were told repeatedly, were American citizens. And we were individual American citizens, not Lithuanian Americans, Irish Americans and so on, even though our parents may have belonged to the local Lithuanian, Polish or Italian social club or read an Armenian or Polish newspaper. We were not classified into racial or ethnic categories for any purpose.

Yes, there was prejudice in America. Why should this country be different from the others? But we all knew from our families there was even more prejudice elsewhere in the world, especially in those countries from which our families had come. Furthermore, the prejudice here was not just in those families who had been here for generations, it was also in the newcomers.

Every group had its own prejudices toward outsiders, as we all learned through experience, and it didn't bother us much. It was just another one of life's many hurdles to surmount. What was more important was that we all lived under the same set of laws as American citizens. These were

ideals, to be sure, not always realities, but they were official ideals with teeth behind them, and we learned that they could be appealed to or drawn on, as women found in the early part of the century in gaining the right to vote or as court decisions and civil rights legislation showed us in the 1950s and 1960s.

Fortunately for us, our teachers didn't subject us to endless lessons on tolerance and on how to be respectful of each other's "culture." They simply modeled tolerance for us and dealt, briefly, with problematic incidents whenever they arose in school. We were thus able to spend most of our school time on academic matters. Our main responsibility was to go to school every day, to be respectful of our teachers and to do our homework.

It's true we didn't see our home cultures in what we read in school, but we identified with each other as American citizens, something we and our parents were proud to be, despite our country's flaws. We probably would have welcomed attempts at a realistic curriculum that included more information or literature on the many immigrant groups in this country, as well as on the African Americans and Native Americans, but only if it did not end up making it more difficult for us to learn how to read and write English or giving us a warped or dishonest view of our own country and the larger world within which we live.

Negative Connotations It is highly ironic that multiculturalism has evolved as an educational philosophy from its original and positive meaning of inclusion to mean something very negative, especially for us. This was one of the major findings of my research on the contents of all the grade 4 and grade 6 readers in six leading basal reading series, published between 1993 and 1995, as reported in Losing Our Language.

Rather than broadening students' horizons about the ethnic diversity of this country, today's version of multiculturalism has led to the suppression of the stories of most immigrant groups to this country. Overall, the selections in these readers convey the picture of an almost monolithic white world, with none of the real ethnic diversity that can be seen in just the listing of restaurants in a telephone directory for any city in this country. Almost all of the various European ethnic groups I grew up with have been excluded. Instead of the real America, we find a highly shrunken mainstream culture in most series, surrounded by Native Americans, Asian Americans, African Americans and Hispanics, none of whom seem to interact much with each other.

Nor do today's readers give children an informed understanding of the real world within which they live. Nowhere do children read about the first airplane flight, the first transatlantic flight, the first exploration of space, the discovery of penicillin or the polio vaccine or how such inventions as the light bulb, radio, telegraph, steamboat, telephone, sewing machine, phonograph or radar came about. Apparently, accounts of these significant discoveries or inventions have been banished from students' common knowledge because most portray the accomplishments of white males.

But without the stories about the pioneers in science and technology (a few of whom were females, like Marie Curie), both boys and girls are unlikely to acquire a historically accurate timeframe for sequencing the major discoveries that have shaped their life today. The greater loss is that of an educational role model. The current substitutes for these stories in the readers--stories about people who have overcome racism or sexism or physical disabilities--are unlikely to give children insights into the power of intellectual curiosity in sustaining perseverance or the role of intellectual gratification in rewarding this perseverance.

Wayward Literacy The most visible problem I found in the readers is at the level of language itself. The kinds of selections now featured in the readers make it almost impossible for children to develop a rich, literate vocabulary in English over the grades. In some series, children must learn a dazzling array of proper nouns, words for the mundane features of daily life, words for ethnic foods in countries around the world and other non-English words, most of which contribute little if anything to the development of their competence in the English language.

For example, consider this paragraph near the end of a story in a grade 4 reader: "In the wee hours of the morning, the family made a circle around Grandma Ida, Beth and Chris. Grandma Ida gave the tamshi la tutaonana: Tin this new year let us continue to practice umoja, kujichagulia, ujima, ujamaa, nia, kuumba and imani. Let us strive to do something that will last as long as the earth turns and water flows. '"

Or consider this sentence in another grade 4 reader: "The whole family sat under wide trees and ate arroz con gandules, pernil, viandas and tostones, ensalada de chayotes y tomates and pasteles."

Or these sentences in a grade 6 reader: "On the engawa after dinner, Mr. Ono said to Mitsuo, 'Take Lincoln to the dojo. You are not too tired, are you, Lincoln-kun? '"

Not only are children in this country unlikely to see any of these Swahili, Spanish or Japanese words in any of their textbooks in science, mathematics or history, they are unlikely to see them in any other piece of literature as well. They have wasted their intellectual energy not only learning their meaning but also learning how to pronounce them. It is not clear why these academically useless words, some of which are italicized, some not, are judged to be of importance by contemporary teacher educators.

These educators also seem to think that children should spend a considerable amount of class time engaged in conversations with each other about each other's ethnic cultures and daily lives--in the name of building self-esteem and group identity. But using precious class time for frequent conversations about intellectually barren topics that draw on intellectually limited vocabularies deprives the very students who most need it of opportunities to practice using the lexical building blocks necessary for conceptual growth and analytical thinking.

The present version of multiculturalism may well be largely responsible, through its effects on classroom materials and instruction, for the growing gap between the scores of minority students and other students on the National Assessment of Educational Progress examinations in reading.

We need public discussions of the goals that should dominate reading instruction. Do we want teachers absorbed with the development of their children's egos, intent on shaping their feelings about themselves and others in specific ways? Or do we want teachers to concentrate on developing their children's minds, helping them acquire the knowledge, vocabulary and analytical skills that enable them to think for themselves and to choose the kind of personal identity they find most meaningful?

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The Washington Post, April 19, 1999

Educators Square Off Over Algebra

Parents Also Join Debate On Value of Earlier Lessons

By Jay Mathews
Washington Post Staff Writer

Jackie Lewis's daughter, Denise, had always done well in math, so Lewis was surprise when the principal at Denise's elementary school in Montgomery County declined to put the girl on a track to take high school algebra in the seventh grade.

The first step would be for Denise to pass a test to get into a pre-algebra course in sixth grade. That kind of acceleration was just not done, the principal said. She would not recommend Denise for the exam. But Lewis pesisted, and in seventh grade, her daughter completed algebra at the top of her class at Tilden Middle School.

Despite the school system's qualms, "I knew that she was in the right place," said Lewis, whose daughter is now a ninth-grader.

Lewis had good reason to push for her daughter to take algebra before high school, many education researchers say. Several recent studies have concluded that algebra is a crucial gateway to more rigorous math and science courses in high school and college—and that those who haven't learned it by eighth grade are less likely to have a successful career in medicine, engineering, computer programming and other scientific fields.

In response to such research, many school systems in the Washington area and throughout the country are rapidly expanding their seventh- and eighth-grade algebra classes and are introducing more algebra concepts in elementary school. Fairfax County, for example, had45 percent of its eighth-graders complete first-year algebra last year, compared with 27 prcent in 1993.

But the trend has sparked widespread debate. Some parents and teachers worry that many children will fail algebra if they take it early and then will lose interest in math. And a committee of the Reston-based National Council of Teachers of Mathematics last year recommended against teaching algebra to middle schoolers, warning that "such acceleration and specialization can have negative consequences for children."

Proponents of early algebra say it is unfair to steer students away from the math-science track before they have even entered high school. Tom Nuttall, math coordinator for Fairfax schools, said his goal is for every student in the county to complete algebra by the eighth grade, although he knows that many teachers, principals and parents feel otherwise.

"Politically, we are not ready for that right now," he said, "but if we are serious about competing internationally, we cannot think of anything less."

About 25 percent of students nationwide take algebra before high school. In the Washington area, the figures range from 21 percent in Anne Arundel County to 45 percent in Fairfax.

Despite the general movement toward earlier exposure to algebra, only five Washington area systems—the District and Arlington, Fairfax, Charles and Fauquier counties—automatically enroll a middle school student in the course if a parent requests it. In many districts, school officials' decisions are influenced heavily by students' scores on pre-algebra tests.

Some parent groups, such as the Gifted and Talented Association of Montgomery County, have criticized local school administrators for placing too many barriers in the path of children who want to take the course early.

Charles K. Walsh, supervisor of math instruction in St. Mary's County, said he wants to increase algebra enrollment in middle school, but within reason. He worries about the effects of failure on young students already fearful of x's and y's.

"We feel that it is better for them to do it when they can do it well and master it rather than get frustrated and turn off of mathematics," he said.

Among many educators, however, concerns about youthful disappointment have been shoved aside by a series of reports suggesting that American children are below where they should be in absorbing complex math concepts.

The Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), an exam given to stu-

dents in 41 countries in 1994, showed U.S. eighth-graders scoring below the world average. U.S. scores were even lower among 12th-graders taking the test.

Researchers who reviewed the TIMSS results concluded that U.S. elementary schools were covering math topics too lightly and too repetitively compared with European and Asian schools. They also said U.S. middle schools had to teach algebra or students would not have enough time in high school to advance to calculus, which is taken by about only 5 percent of American high school students but is common in secondary schools overseas.

Various studies also have shown that students who take algebra before high school score higher on the math portion of the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) and are more likely to be admitted to a selective college.

The TIMSS study led the American Federation of Teachers last summer to recommend a national, voluntary math test for eighth-graders with "much more algebra and geometry than.... currently contained in our curriculum." The California state school board has set a goal for all eighth-graders to learn algebra, and several states, including Virginia, now require students to take statewide tests in algebra in middle or high school.

Leading the other side of the debate is the committee of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics. In its draft report released in October, the committee said algebra classes in middle school were a bad idea—not because of the danger of high failure rates but because students would miss out on other kinds of math.

"Students are likely to have less opportunity to learn the full range of mathematics content, especially topics in geometry and data analysis, that are expected in the middle grades," the report said. It recommended filling all middle school math classes with some algebraic concepts.

Richard L. Rose, Loudoun County's supervisor for math and science instruction, scoffs at that advice. "It is like teaching someone to drive by showing them one year what a tire is and the next year what the engine is," Rose said. "Algebra is not a mystical subject. It does not have to be taught that delicately."

Many high school science teachers say they would like more students to have early algebra so they could better understand concepts in chemistry and physics. But some question the quality of math instruction in middle school.

"I've been dismayed at the algebra of many of my students, even many taking calculus," said Jim Jarvis, chairman of the Science Department at Fairfax's Chantilly High School. "It is as if the system is more interested in getting the right word on the transcript rather than ensuring that the students know anything well."

Nuttall, the Fairfax math coordinator, said he hears complaints from teachers about the quality of work in expanded middle school algebra classes. But it is their job to make it better, he said.

In Loudoun, 42 percent of last year's eighth-graders had completed algebra, a jump from 17 percent in 1992. Rose said he wants to get every child into algebra by the eighth grade. For those eighth-graders who are not ready for a full dose of the subject, he has instituted a two-year algebra course that is taught at half-speed and completed at the end of ninth grade. Teachers can move students in the slower course to the fast one if they seem to be doing well in the first few weeks.

In Arlington, the entire math curriculum has been redrawn in the last year to introduce algebraic ideas in elementary school and to build skills for more success in eighth-grade algebra, math coordinator Pat Robertson said. But, she said, she is worried about pushing too hard and too fast.

"We have this philosophy that we have algebra for everyone, but I am concerned about it being everyone before they get to the ninth grade," she said. "How many kids are we going to lose because it is so over their heads?"

Getting a Jump on Algebra

The figures below show what percentage of the students who finished eighth grade in 1998 in Washington area school systems had completed first-year algebra. The chart also shows which school systems automatically enroll children in algebra in the eighth grade if their parents request it.

School system	Eighth-graders completing algebra	Automatically enroll at parent's request
D.C.	36 percent	Yes
Alexandria	23 percent	No
Arlington	25 percent	No
Fairfax	45 percent	Yes
Fauquier	36 percent	Yes
Loudoun	42 percent	No
Prince William	34 percent	No
Stafford	25 percent	No
Anne Arundel	21 percent	No
Calvert	31 percent	No
Charles	25 percent*	Yes
Frederick	39 percent	No
Howard	30 to 35 percent*	No
St. Mary's	25 to 30 percent*	No
Montgomery	33 percent	No
Prince George's	30 percent	No

*School officials' estimate SOURCE: Washington area school systems

THE WASHINGTON POST

The USA Today, April 5, 1999

Schools devalue the drive to be valedictorian

Complex calculations cause hurt feelings, spawn lawsuits

By Lawrence Muhammed
USA TODAY

Ricky Steelman was bald in patches from alopecia his freshman year of high school. He had no friends.

"I had no eyelashes or eyebrows," says Steelman, 17, a senior at Oak Hills High School near Cincinnati. "I was called names like 'Mr. Clean.' It was a real rough time."

His big dream was to be the valedictorian of the senior class. "I set that as a goal for myself, an honor I could strive for," he says, "that no matter what I looked like or what anyone called me, they couldn't take that away."

Or so he thought.

In a policy change this year, Oak Hills no longer recognizes valedictorians and salutatorians, though Steelman's hard-earned 7.461 GPA is first out of 663 students in his class.

He'll still get special recognition, but as one of 15 academic achievers with grade point averages of 3.9 or above.

Says Jim Williamson, the principal: "If other people are performing well academically, why not honor a larger group? What we've tried to do is expand that number."

Typically, the top student would be named valedictorian, a title that comes with scholarship eligibility in many programs. But schools across the country are knocking them off their lofty perch. Rockford, Ill., public schools no longer recognize them. Neither do two-thirds of the public schools in Montgomery County, Md.

Some schools in California have multiple valedictorians, while others have none.

The schools in Jefferson Parish, outside New Orleans, are considering cum laude titles for dozens of honors graduates.

At most schools, public and private, the tradition continues. But some educators worry that singling out the top achievers diminishes the accomplishments of others.

Also, the criteria have changed. Valedictorian once signified mastery of a high school's coursework as graded on a 4-point scale. Now honors and college courses can boost GPAs to 8 and above.

And administrators say the complicated formulas to decide the head of the class involve too many variables. "The reason some schools move away from valedictorian titles is that students take different-level academic courses that are very rigorous, and to weigh those equally becomes difficult at times," says John Lammel, director of high school services for the National Association of Secondary School Principals.

Oak Hills changed its program last year after naming a valedictorian who was second in the class. The student with the best grades, who already had enough graduation credits, took more classes at the University of Cincinnati senior year than at Oak Hills and was disqualified.

"I didn't take any college courses because I knew it could cause problems," Steelman says. "I stayed loyal to my school. Now I'm being punished."

Some driven students vying to be No. 1 are taking the contests to court.

▶ A student in Snyder, Texas, challenged the title co-valedictorian in federal court in 1995 because she was ineligible for state-funded college tuition available to the valedictorian only. The judge ruled against her in what was the first suit of its kind in the state.

▶ Parents of a White House, Tenn., senior expecting salutatorian honors in 1997 tried to stop publication of the yearbook and demanded a public apology to their daughter after several students taking Advanced Placement courses surpassed her in grade rankings.

By Yon Poirier, The Cincinnati Enquirer

Pomp and bad circumstances: Oak Hills (Ohio) High senior Ricky Steelman worked hard to become valedictorian but lost the chance.

▶ A Long Island, N.Y., senior battled in state court in 1996 after her high school changed its policy and counted grade point averages in the second semester of the senior year instead of the first, denying her the top honor. She had a cumulative score of 95.62; the other student had 95.67.

How can academic rivalry get this serious? Consider the case of Cassie Davis in Nunn, Colo., last year. Since middle school, she and Shane Danielson had competed to be the smartest kid in class.

"We would look at class rankings, and the other students would know what we scored," says Davis, now a sophomore at the University of Northern Colorado. "They'd say, 'Shane's up 5%' or 'Cassie's up 5%.' We hung out in the same groups and were pretty close."

Up until the third quarter of senior year.

That's when Davis was crushed to learn that college courses she was taking, paid for by the high school because she'd earned enough credits to graduate, had hurt her chances for valedictorian.

"They pulled us in the principal's office and said Shane had come out ahead by one one-hundredth of a point," she says.

Claiming she'd been cheated out of the title, her parents mounted a failed court challenge that pitted Cassie's classmates against one another and divided the town.

"The whole issue has gotten out of hand," says Charles Sykes, author of *Dumbing Down Our Kids: Why American Kids Feel Good About Themselves but Can't Read, Write, or Add* (St. Martin's Press, $14.95). "In some ways, this is the academic version of Little League parents from hell. But frankly, valedictorians and salutatorians are among the relatively few coveted honors for students who study hard. And we're eliminating them because we're afraid that the kids who don't win will feel bad. Or we're blaming competition. I think that's a mistake."

With tracking programs, honor rolls and college aptitude tests under scrutiny, the challenge to valedictorians may come as no surprise.

But some of the most bitter valedictorian conflicts involve the extra weight given honors and college courses and whether they count — a separate problem, says Gary Crosby Brasor, associate director for the National Association of Scholars, an education reform group. "It used to be in high school you had a perfect grade of 4.0. Then they said 4 is the best you can do except when you do a 5. That's obviously going to lead to disappointment, acrimony and anger. In any sphere, and not limited to academics, you're going to have difficulty if you don't have a stable measurement."

Students involved say the title of valedictorian is still worth shooting for. "What my old school is going to do now is honor the top 10%, which isn't the same as the best," Davis says. "Valedictorian was showing us we always had to strive for the best."

"It's an honor to be in the Olympics," Steelman says, "but they're all striving for the gold medal. Valedictorian is like the gold medal of academics in high school."

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Selected Readings on School Reform

Higher Education

Affirmative action again dominates the higher education news. First, James Traub follows the "Class of Prop. 209" in his *New York Times Magazine* piece. He discovers that California campuses are "managing to maintain diversity without racial set-asides." As predicted, the state's premier public campuses—Berkeley and UCLA—saw minority enrollment cut in half; but many of the students declined by Berkley and UCLA were admitted at less selective U.C. campuses, such as Irving, Riverside and Santa Cruz. Greater outreach to minority students is another of Prop. 209's outcomes: "U.C. campuses are now reaching down into the high schools, the junior highs and even the elementary schools to help minority students achieve the kind of academic record that will make them eligible for admission, thus raising the possibility that diversity without preferences will someday prove to be more than a fond hope."

California's approach may soon be illegal if the Clinton Administration has its way. A new federal civil rights regulation being floated among higher education officials would disallow standardized tests as the primary factor for acceptance into colleges if they have a "disparate impact" on various racial groups. In *U.S. News & World Report*, John Leo opines that this measure is "an attempt to decapitate traditional assessments of merit at a single stroke and push the colleges to accept large numbers of applicants that are well below their standards." Others call it "bureaucratic terrorism."

Next, James Bowman, writing in the *National Review*, poses the question: "Do too many students go to college?" His answer: Yes. Citing studies indicating that graduates gain little advancement from their time in college, Bowman concludes that too much attention and money is directed towards funding students to go to college to learn things—like reading—that they should have learned in high school. He concludes that not everyone is cut out for college and, moreover, that college isn't all it's cracked up to be.

Kathy Morgan disagrees. Profiled by Robert Suskind in the *Wall Street Journal*, she is the college counselor at All Hallows High School in the South Bronx who had a 100% college acceptance rate last year and is attempting a repeat performance. Although many of her students need remedial education once in college, Morgan is confident that they benefit academically and otherwise from attending college. Hence her determination to get them—every last one of them—into college.

DDW

The New York Times Magazine, May 2, 1999

THE CLASS OF PROP. 209

In the wake of affirmative action, campuses in California are managing to maintain diversity without racial set-asides. This will satisfy neither liberals nor conservatives, but it's looking a lot like the future.

BY JAMES TRAUB

Photographs by Gail Albert Halaban

THE CAMPUS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA AT BERKELEY IN SPRINGTIME IS about as close to Shangri-La as most mortals are likely to get. When I paid a visit last month, the dogwoods and the cherry trees were in splendid bloom, and the broad, sunny plaza in front of the Mario Savio Steps at Sproul Hall was jammed with students. I had arrived during campaign season, and kids were milling around the plaza holding placards and bedsheets promising better, wiser, bolder student government. Berkeley must be one of the few universities with standing political parties, and several of the parties had set up booths. One of the loneliest of them, never staffed by more than a student or two, belonged to the Defend Affirmative Action Party.

A year earlier, when the ban on the use of affirmative action enacted by the Board of Regents of the university and confirmed by voters in Proposition 209 went into effect, freshman minority enrollment at Berkeley had been cut by half. Conservatives had got their wish, but it had led to precisely the disaster predicted by affirmative action's backers. It wouldn't have been surprising, then, if preferences were a roaring issue on campus. I asked a student if the Defend Affirmative Action Party had a chance of winning a seat in this spring's elections in the student government. He consulted a friend. "Not really," he said. A poll taken at the time of Prop. 209 showed that in fact most students opposed affirmative action.

Across the plaza, one of the most popular parties, Calserve, was handing out fliers urging students to vote yes on Proposition 3, which, by contrast, was considered a shoo-in. It called for student fees to be increased by $3 in order to support outreach efforts to increase the flow of minority students from local high schools. Berkeley students, in turns out, are like most Americans: they want diversity without the zero-sum calculus that inevitably accompanies affirmative action.

Ending affirmative action on campus has had many fewer nightmarish effects in California than you might have thought from the initial returns. Many, though scarcely all, of the minority

students who didn't get in to Berkeley or U.C.L.A. the first year after Prop. 209 was passed enrolled instead at one of the less selective U.C. campuses, including Irvine, Santa Cruz and Riverside — a phenomenon known in the affirmative action world as "cascading." What's more, thanks to some deft fiddling with admissions criteria, Berkeley found that the zero-sum calculus was not quite as inexorable as it seemed. In early April, the admissions office announced that Berkeley had admitted 30 percent more minority students than it had the year before. Apparently it takes a year to get the fiddling right, since Boalt Hall, Berkeley's law school, experienced a comparable jump in its second post-preference entering class as well.

Finally, ending affirmative action has had one unpublicized and profoundly desirable consequence: it has forced the university to try to expand the pool of eligible minority students. Outreach programs like the one underwritten by Proposition 3 have proliferated; the State Legislature authorized $38.5 million for such efforts last year and has required the public schools to spend an additional $31 million on similar initiatives. U.C. campuses are now reaching down into the high schools, the junior highs and even the elementary schools to help minority students achieve the kind of academic record that will make them eligible for admission, thus raising the possibility that diversity without preferences will someday prove to be more than a fond hope. Academics and administrators throughout the system admit that the university would never have shouldered this burden had it not been for the elimination of affirmative action; and many say that the price is worth paying. As Saul Geiser, head of student academic services for the U.C. system, says: "California has brought this whole new thing to the country with Proposition 209. Maybe we can be the ones who begin to show what's on the other side."

What's on the other side is not so much a coherent alternative to affirmative action as it is a series of impromptu adaptations. Elements of this unsystematic system may frustrate ideologues on both sides of the debate: liberals think that cascading represents a terrible denial of opportunity, and conservatives think that fiddling undermines the principle of merit. The question is whether the new dispensation is preferable to the old one. The answer is yes.

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA IS, LIKE GAUL, divided into three parts. According to the 1960 master plan, the top eighth of graduates in the state are eligible to enroll in one of the U.C. campuses; the top third may attend one of the Cal State colleges, and the remainder can enroll in junior college and eventually transfer to a four-year institution (though few actually do). In recent years, however, as increasing numbers of high-school graduates have trained their sights on Berkeley and U.C.L.A., the U.C. system has developed a meritocratic ladder of its own. The campuses at the bottom, including Santa Cruz and Riverside, accept all U.C.-eligible students, but you have to be in the upper third of that group — in the top 4 percent of the state — to make it into Berkeley or U.C.L.A. Not many Latinos, and a minuscule number of blacks, make it into this pool-within-a-pool. And so the essential function of affirmative action in California has been to redistribute minority students from the bottom to the top of the U.C. ladder. Berkeley's gain, until recently, has been Riverside's loss. Now it's working the other way around. One way to think about the consequences of ending affirmative action, then, is to ask, How bad is it to go to Riverside?

It's not a question that goes down well on the Riverside campus. One afternoon in March I sat around a table with a group of black and Chicano students who were involved in Riverside's outreach program. (Chicanos are Latinos of Mexican extraction.) When I asked Kenya Coleman, a black student who was majoring in business, whether she felt that students denied admission to Berkeley would be losing out on something at Riverside, she bristled slightly and said, "If they end up here it would be a blessing in disguise."

Coleman had in fact been accepted at U.C.L.A., but had elected to come to Riverside. Another student, Ricardo Vargas, was just as loyal to the campus and even less inclined to give lip service to affirmative action. Vargas said that his parents had been farmers in Mexico. "I grew up in a poor family," he said. "My parents instilled in me the fact that education is the only way to succeed. If I can burn the midnight oil and work hard, I don't see why everyone else can't."

U.C.R. is a cozy institution where classes are small and professors keep long office hours and freely give out their home phone numbers. Virtually every student I talked to remarked on what a welcoming place it was. Black students, who report feeling uncomfortable or beleaguered on many campuses, brought this up again and again. Bert Wright Jr., a senior with a shaved head, wire-rimmed glasses and a scraggly Ho Chi Minh beard, said that his father had gone to U.C.L.A. and that he had been accepted there himself. But thanks to a campus-based program for minority students, Wright had spent parts of the summers after his sophomore and junior years in high school on the Riverside campus, where he worked on science projects with a professor, and that heady experience had sold him on the school.

"I think I am more prepared in terms of graduate school than I would have been if I had gone to U.C.L.A.," Wright said. "Some of the professors there are not necessarily as humble as they are here." The accepted wisdom on campus was that U.C.L.A. was so big and overcrowded and the professors so unapproachable that students rarely had a chance to speak to their instructors and often had to wait a semester or two to take the courses they wanted.

I met a surprising number of students who, like Wright or Coleman, had got into fancier schools but had chosen to enroll at Riverside, and none of them had come to regret it. A black student named Mark Thomas told me that he had been accepted at U.C.L.A., Berkeley, Yale and Princeton, but that he had chosen Riverside because it was much cheaper than the Ivy Leagues and had offered scholarship money unavailable at the other U.C. schools. Thomas was majoring in biochemistry. "This year," he said, "I've already spent two and a half to three hours with my academic adviser; I've heard that the average at other places is about half an hour."

I spoke to only a few freshmen who felt bitter about ending up at Riverside after failing to gain admission to U.C.L.A. or Berkeley. I also found several Asian upperclassmen who felt that they had been denied a shot at a more prestigious school by the end of affirmative action, but even most of them believed they they were getting a rigorous education, at least in the sciences.

Riverside has almost all the trappings of a serious university: a first-rate engineering school, a supercompetitive biomedical program, a grassy quad crisscrossed by pathways, a clock tower. Still, Riverside is deep in the boonies: 60 miles east of Los Angeles, in the heart of what is known as the Inland Empire. It is considered a fairly dead town, and students say that entertainment near campus is limited to one movie theater and one Starbucks. The parking lots near the dorms are jammed, since almost everyone drives home on weekends. It's the kind of technocratic, friendly, bland and utilitarian institution summed up by the words "second-tier."

Riverside is much stronger in the sciences than in the humanities. An upper-level political science class I attended was positively torpid. One student, Josh Phillips, a white kid from Orange County who had scored a 1,400 on his S.A.T.'s but hadn't been able to afford Berkeley

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because of the higher housing costs, said tartly, "I'd rather be a number at U.C.L.A. than an individual here." Phillips was working 20 hours a week, taking 20 credits and keeping a high G.P.A. without apparently breaking a sweat. The intellectual life at Riverside seemed at least as meager as the social life. When I asked about campus politics, Bert Wright said, "There aren't too many issues that rile students up." He thought for a while. "There's fees, of course, and parking."

Still, Riverside is much more than a credentialing factory. Many of the minority students I met were involved in the school's innumerable outreach programs. Indeed, one reason scarcely anyone could get agitated about affirmative action was that Riverside has an active sense of social mission that made the whole issue of preferences seem almost irrelevant. When I paid a visit to Carlos Vélez-Ibáñez, dean of the College of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences, he started telling me about a program he had devised to bring minority students from a local community college to the campus for an intensive five-week summer course in research and statistical methods. Eleven of the 13 students he had worked with had gone on to Stanford or to a U.C. college; he said that he planned to expand the program to the high-school and then to the junior-high level. "What we're not doing is making decisions based solely on race or ethnicity or gender," he said. "But we're still acting affirmatively, giving people a chance to be excellent." Affirmative action, at least as he understood it, had mostly involved a rather trivial form of reshuffling within the elite. "Seventy-five percent of African-American and Mexican families are working class," said Vélez-Ibáñez. "My gestalt is to look at the 75 percent and provide opportunities for them."

The pipeline-expanding idea that is novel elsewhere in the system has been close to the core of Riverside's identity throughout this decade. When a physicist named Raymond Orbach was appointed chancellor in 1992, he realized that the key to growth was to recruit more of the Asian, Chicano and black students from the surrounding region. Riverside and the neighboring San Bernardino Counties are among the poorest regions in California served by a U.C. campus; in 1990, only 6 percent of graduates in the area were U.C.-eligible. Orbach made it a universitywide mission to increase the supply of eligible students through recruitment as well as academic coaching, and he appears to have proved that the problem is not quite as intransigent as it seems. Between 1990 and 1996, for instance, the fraction of U.C.-eligible students declined in almost every region of California; in Riverside and San Bernardino Counties, the figure rose from 6 to 8.1 percent.

Orbach told me that only a thousand black graduates in the state had made it into the top eighth, but he was wrong; the most recent sample, from 1996, put the number at 547. And the success of Asians, many of whom come from poor immigrant families, only underscores this gulf: the same study found that 30 percent of Asians graduate in the top eighth, but only 12.7 percent of whites, 3.8 percent of Latinos and 2.8 percent of blacks do so. An Asian student, in other words, is 10 times as likely as a black student to be U.C.-eligible.

Indeed, blacks have been left behind as social change and social mobility have made affirmative action unnecessary for one group after another. In California, women were dropped long ago from the category of "underrepresented" groups. Filipinos were once underrepresented, and then they weren't. So many non-Chicano Latinos have been making it into the top eighth that the category was being phased out at some campuses even before the regents' decision. Chicanos remain the most disadvantaged of California's major minority groups, with many first-generation parents both impoverished and illiterate. Nevertheless, a slightly higher fraction of Chicanos than blacks make it into U.C., and at both Riverside and Berkeley I met a remarkable number of Chicano students who had overcome every imaginable disadvantage to become U.C.-eligible. Second-generation Chicanos will almost certainly do better than first-generation ones, and the terrible problem of black students will remain.

Orbach is a thickset, bustling, enthusiastic character, an ardent booster who believes, like Kenya Coleman, that no rational student could regret enrollment at Riverside. Almost every week the chancellor rides the circuit of the region's high schools; the day I saw him he happened to be heading out to Indio High School near Palm Springs, and he invited me to come along. We were running late for the scheduled parents' meeting at the school, about 60 miles to our east, and so Orbach roared along at 75 m.p.h. as he delivered a town-by-town analysis of U.C. potential on either side of U.S. 10. "We're passing through the Moreno Valley here — very poor area, very few kids going to four-year colleges." Then came Banning and Beaumont, where the candidates were slightly more plentiful and the campus had a relationship with the high schools. Then, on the flat, wind-swept plains on the other side of the San Andreas Fault were Desert Hot Springs, Palm Springs, Thousand Palms. Orbach said there had been gang violence at one school not long before. There is probably no job that promotes orotundity and the global perspective like being a university chancellor. And yet Orbach had strapped himself to his provincial neighborhood and absorbed its nuances like a social worker.

We reached Indio High School by about 7:30 P.M. and were met by the principal, Rudy Ramirez, a restless, demanding figure straight out of "Stand and Deliver." Indio is a largely Chicano school that for years had sent virtually no one to a U.C. campus. On the drive in, Orbach had told me that Ramirez had confronted him at a meeting of local principals several years earlier, saying, "Our students are much better than you realize, only you won't let them in." Orbach had agreed on the spot to have his admissions staff interview seniors whom Ramirez felt could succeed at Riverside despite an academic record that would not qualify them for U.C. admission. Only 13 of the 36 seniors he chose ultimately graduated, but a relationship sprang up between the two institutions. Indio is now sending two dozen or so students, out of a graduating senior class of 400, to U.C. campuses each year.

Orbach had come often to harp on his favorite subject: students must take algebra in eighth grade if they expected to be U.C.-eligible; Ramirez had, in turn, initiated a 30-day intersession class for students who failed algebra. A team of instructors from Riverside had recently come out to review the transcripts of the entire junior class. And the Indio faculty would soon be going to the campus to work on curriculum.

About 125 people, mostly parents and students, had gathered in the auditorium to hear the chancellor; 30 or so listened on headphones to a simultaneous translation in Spanish. Orbach came out and said, "This is the finest public university in the world, and each of you has an opportunity to attend a campus of that university." That was it for the rhetoric; the rest was practical, blunt advice. Orbach showed the audience a chart indicating the magnitude of the earnings differential between a college and a junior-college degree. He talked about financial arrangements that would allow the child even of the poorest parents to afford the $13,000 or so in annual costs. And then he painstakingly led them through the sequence of math courses that their child would need to take in order to end up at pre-calculus in 12th grade, as the university requires. "Your child," he admonished, "should be able to add, subtract, multiply and divide fractions by sixth grade." Afterward, all the questions were about money. Most of the parents were poor, very few had been to college and the idea that their children could attend the extraordinary university that the chancellor was talking about plainly strained their sense of credulity.

Riverside's relationship with Indio has been assimilated into a statewide School-University Partnership program created by the new legislation. Riverside now has similar ties with seven school districts, in each case comprising one high school and a junior high school and two elementary schools that feed into it. Two of those high schools are virtually all black and Latino and have about the lowest U.C.-eligibility rate in the state — 1 or 2 percent. Obviously, it remains to be seen how much of a difference Riverside can make by reaching downward into the public schools. Pamela Clute, the math professor who was appointed to run the program, which now spends $5 million a year, is one of those who believe that it took the prospect of a world without preferences to make the university wake up to its own obligations. "Until about a year ago," she says, "what outreach meant was fuzzy, feel-good stuff — come to the campus on Saturday, see the buildings, look at the daffodils. Now, it's taken on a life of its own, and it's been put at the core of the university's existence."

Perhaps it will prove to be beneath the dignity of scholars at a place like Berkeley to huddle with high-school teachers and to give pep talks to parents; that's not, after all, what any of them had in mind when they ground their way through their doctorates. Robert Berdahl, the chancellor of Berkeley, says flatly, "The University of California in its eight institutions can not reform the public schools." What is striking, though, is the extent to which Riverside, a far more humble and pragmatic institution, has begun to reshape itself around the mission of expanding the pool of eligible minority students. Clute says that by placing the program under the control of a scholar like herself, the chancellor is sending a signal to her colleagues that outreach is an academic — not merely a public relations — function of the university. There has been discussion of weighing community service more heavily when considering promotions and merit raises.

Ray Orbach is not a national figure like Robert Berdahl or like Derek Bok and William Bowen, the former presidents of Harvard and Princeton, whose book, "The Shape of the River," has

helped make the case for affirmative action. But Orbach has arguably done more than any of them to advance the cause of minority education.

DESPITE ORBACH'S EXTRAORDINARY SUCCESS in expanding minority enrollment, it is he who wrote the position paper in which all the chancellors in the U.C. system laid out their objections to the regents' anti-affirmative action policies. Orbach made a point of telling me, "I don't want this to be perceived as somehow a replacement for affirmative action." He is not convinced that what has worked for Riverside will work at the much higher level of selectivity required to bring minority students to Berkeley. Indeed, in California and in Texas, where a 1996 court decision, Hopwood v. Texas, prohibited the use of affirmative action in higher education, the end of racial preferences is widely seen as the harbinger of a tremendous catastrophe for minority students.

Jerome Karabel, a Berkeley scholar and a leading authority on affirmative action, calls the rollback "the biggest negative redistribution of educational opportunity in the history of the country." Technically, that may be true. But the sky-is-falling position assumes both that elite institutions will not have significant minority representation without preferences and that students who descend a tier in educational prestige will suffer a devastating loss. And both those assumptions seem hyperbolic.

There's no question that what began in Texas and California is now moving on to other states. An organization called the Center for Individual Rights, working through local plaintiffs, has filed two lawsuits, which are expected to be heard in the late summer or fall, against the University of Michigan and its law school, as well as another against the University of Washington Law School. Any public institution practicing affirmative action is potentially subject to 14th Amendment due-process claims, and since most law schools and medical schools, and about the upper fifth of undergraduate institutions, practice affirmative action to a significant degree, similar lawsuits can be filed in many other states and almost certainly will be if the plaintiffs win in any of the current cases.

Yet, even if the plaintiffs in these cases prevail, "redistribution" will probably not become widespread. Terence Pell, the senior counsel at the Center for Individual Rights, points out that only 6 of the 74 colleges, universities and graduate programs in California and Texas suffered from a loss of minority students in the first year; even at those six, minority enrollment increased in the second year. At the University of Texas, it dropped only slightly after Hopwood went into effect. "I don't think we can conclude that it's impossible for even the flagship schools to get the numbers where they were before the use of preferences," Pell says. In fact, the Texas experience will probably be the norm for most public universities, since few are as selective as Berkeley.

At the graduate-school level, however, even the cheery Pell concedes that "it's going to take a few years" before the fraction of minority students at the most desirable graduate schools — including Boalt and the University of Texas Law School — return to affirmative action levels. And as Jerome Karabel observes, more than half the applicants in any given year are not accepted into any medical school. And so, without affirmative action, many minority students may not be able to attend medical school at all.

What about those who do cascade downward — what kind of harms will they suffer? None, say many conservatives. Stephan and Abigail Thernstrom, authors of "America in Black and White," write that historically black colleges produce more black engineers and doctors than all of the Ivies and the other great universities. In a critique of "The Shape of the River," Martin Trow, an emeritus professor at Berkeley and a prominent critic of affirmative action, writes, "The notion that you have to go to one of the most selective universities to fulfill your potential, or to become a leader in America, betrays an elitist conception of American life."

Conservatives have consistently argued that affirmative action does not benefit its beneficiaries. The Thernstroms write that black students are likelier to succeed academically, and to graduate, at institutions for which they are qualified than at those to which they have been granted special access. Mark Thomas, the black biochemistry student at Riverside, agrees. "The model of affirmative action is better here," he told me. "It's more a question of getting you in, and once you're here we're going to try to make you succeed. The other way is, 'We can get you in, but we don't think you're going to be able to do the work.'"

And yet this view, too, is overdrawn, as a comparison of Berkeley and Riverside makes clear. The Thernstroms make great use of Berkeley, where until recently the black graduation rate was only 60 percent. By 1998, however, the graduation rate was up to 71 percent for black students and 78 percent for Latinos. At Riverside, the graduation rate for the entire class was only 68 percent. For blacks it was just 60 percent. You'd think that rigorous schools would have higher dropout rates, but in fact the opposite is true. Mark Thomas, the student at Riverside, has it backward: once you have been admitted to the rarefied community of a Harvard or a Yale or a Berkeley, you are almost not allowed to fail. As Bok and Bowen observe, in the sample of 28 elite schools they studied, "even those black students in the lowest S.A.T. band (those with combined scores under 1,000) graduated at *higher* rates, the more selective the school they attended." The elites, in short, protect their own.

What is true is that at lower levels of selectivity the gap can be very large: 72 percent of white students, but only 39 percent of black students, typically graduate from Colorado University at Boulder.

But what about the actual experience? Bok and Bowen concede that minority students do not flourish academically at elite schools; the average black admittee in their study graduated at the 23d percentile of the class, while the average Hispanic was at the 36th percentile. Many of the minority students I met at Berkeley had been stunned by how hard the work was and had thrashed around unhappily for a while. Susana Morales, a slight girl with a piping voice, tortoise-shell glasses and a shy smile, admitted that, at first, she had been overwhelmed at Berkeley. "It took me about three semesters to learn everything," she said. "I had to learn how to read critically. I had to learn how to think critically. I had to learn how to study critically. It's still very hard for me to compete."

But you could also argue that students like Morales profit more from the challenge than do their more blasé classmates. Morales, who is hoping to pursue a Ph.D. in cultural psychology, said that Berkeley "was everything I expected." She had been thrilled to discover that her professors were part of larger intellectual currents she had never recognized before. "In my class on drugs and the brain," she said, "every day I would go home and read an article that was parallel to what the professor was saying."

And if Susana Morales had gone to Riverside? In all likelihood, she would have been quite happy, as most of the minority students I met there were, and she would have gone on to a productive, successful life — but at a somewhat lower trajectory. A large fraction of the female students I spoke to at Riverside, minority as well as nonminority, planned on a career as teachers — a very modest ambition compared with pursuing a Ph.D. in cultural psychology. According to Deborah McCoy, Riverside's head of placement, very few minority students go on to medical school, and the law schools they choose tend to be the local or regional institutions, like U.S.C., Loyola Marymount or McGeorge Law School at the University of the Pacific.

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What, then, is at stake in affirmative action? It is certainly not true, as you sometimes hear, that the black or Hispanic middle class depends on affirmative action for its survival and growth. Only about 20 percent of the nation's colleges — the prestigious ones that everyone has heard of — even use preferences to a significant degree. The vast majority of four-year institutions admit all or almost all of the students who apply. Most important, the number of blacks enrolling in college has continued to rise: they now constitute 11 percent of the college-going population, up from 8.8 percent in 1985.

What's at stake is not a place in the middle class, but a place in the elite — in the famous universities and graduate schools and in the law firms and banks and foundations and so on that lie at the apogee of the culture and that offer the big rewards. Another way of putting it is that affirmative action permits minority students to compress their climb up the ladder of social mobility by a generation or so and thus speeds their assimilation into the larger culture. This is hardly a good to be dismissed. On the other hand, it is a good that one would very much prefer to see accomplished without recourse to racial preferences. There is a third way.

YOU CAN EXPLODE A LOT OF MYTHS about affirmative action by the simple expedient of talking to students. One morning I sat down at a table in the main campus commissary at Berkeley — caffe latte, croissants, grilled cheese — across from a white freshman named Eric who wore armlets of braided black leather straps and hair moussed straight upward. Eric looked like the latter-day version of the classic Berkeley radical, but when I asked about the elimination of affirmative action, what came out of his mouth was pure Norman Podhoretz. "I don't think it's such a bad thing," said Eric (who felt sufficiently nervous about his position to keep his last name to himself). "I don't believe that the S.A.T.'s are biased against minority students. If you know your English vocabulary, then you know your English vocabulary; that's it." Eric acknowledged that his North Hollywood high school had given him enormous, even "unfair," advantages over many minority students, but he had concluded that "it makes much more sense to send students who aren't prepared to community college," from which they could transfer.

Most of the white and Asian students I talked to, both at Berkeley and at Riverside, were rigorous meritocrats; they took it for granted that S.A.T. scores and G.P.A. measured something fundamental. Of course, they viewed affirmative action less in ideological than in personal terms; as one freshman said to me, "I felt like I was a target." I found very few ardent supporters among white or Asian students. Vinnee Tong, the editor of the student paper, The Daily Californian, told me, "At the last minute, I voted no," on Prop. 209, and then she added, "but if you asked me again, I might vote yes."

Does it matter what students think? When I asked Chancellor Berdahl, he said, "I don't happen to believe that that means a whole lot." And yet Berdahl, like virtually all university administrators, also takes the position that affirmative action is good — indeed, *Continued on page 76*

Continued from page 51

profoundly good — for students like Eric and Tong. "If the campus is predominantly white and Asian," he said, "the kind of education those students are going to receive is going to be different, and I would argue, it would be deficient. I think the beneficiaries of affirmative action are both sides of the racial divide." In other words, Berdahl takes the exact opposite position from the Thernstroms: affirmative action is a benefit for everyone.

University administrators and concerned faculty members talk endlessly about the benefits of "diversity," by which they generally mean ethnic background. Admissions departments also select students on the basis of, say, geographic diversity, but you rarely hear about the importance of "the Midwestern viewpoint" — nor do such forms of diversity require much preferential treatment.

Alex Saragoza, a professor in the ethnic studies department, said to me, "Kids need to understand that diversity is fundamental." But the problem is, they don't. The students I spoke to viewed diversity as a worthwhile goal, but scarcely a fundamental one. If diversity required paying a price in merit, then they would sacrifice some diversity. What's more, diversity felt more like a piety than a vivid reality. Most of the white and Asian students I spoke to felt quite cut off from black and Latino students. Social life was largely balkanized by ethnic identity. Only a few classes were small enough for the kind of sustained discussion that would feature the black or Latino "view." And the number of minorities in such upper-level classes was very small. Most of the minority students I spoke to said the same thing. As Felicia Brown, a black junior, put it, "The color lines here are very distinct; it's very rare that there's any kind of crossing." What about in the dorms? It turned out that Brown had decided to live in the all-black "theme" dorm.

Indeed, racial self-segregation is such a widespread phenomenon on campus that you can hardly say that it is caused by affirmative action. But it wouldn't be surprising if the preoccupation with supposed racial or ethnic points of view, not to mention the very existence of a separate set of admissions standards, had the effect of reinforcing boundaries of identity. And this sat very ill with students who did not wish to be defined by their ethnic background. Vinnee Tong said to me: "They have a week of orientation when you first get here, and they give you this talk about diversity — what kind of place do you come from, what kind of people did you live with? They really shove that down your throat. I come from a predominantly white, Republican town in Northern California, and all of a sudden I'm an Asian girl, whether I like it or not. I really resented it."

If talking to white and Asian students demolishes one shibboleth of affirmative action, talking to the beneficiaries demolishes another — the "stigma." In "The Content of Our Character," Shelby Steele writes, "Preferential treatment, no matter how it is justified in the light of day, subjects blacks to a midnight of self-doubt, and so often transforms their advantage into a revolving door." Well it might. But try and find the evidence that this is so. For one thing, most of the minority students I have spoken to, at Berkeley and elsewhere, do not believe that they are affirmative action beneficiaries, even when the facts cry out that they are. As Susana Morales put it: "I don't think I needed affirmative action. I took the hardest courses at my school, I had a good G.P.A. and I wrote a really good essay." The minority students all seem to have written terrific essays, though until recently the essay counted for very little in the admissions process. Only when she admitted that she had scored 990 on her S.A.T.'s — about 350 points below the Berkeley average — did Morales concede that she might have benefited from affirmative action.

> Affirmative action is not only a set of practices but also a way of thinking. And the truth is that it is not a way of thinking that even its advocates feel terribly comfortable about.

Perhaps this evasion only proves Steele's point. And yet you wonder if the stigma argument doesn't have more to do with how critics think students ought to feel than how they actually do. The typical point of view was Felicia Brown's: "With or without affirmative action, I deserve to be here." Minority students look around and realize that they have had to fight their way through thickets unheard of in North Hollywood. Saul Mercado, a senior, said: "I come from a family of 11 kids. My father got as far as third grade; my mother stopped at second grade. There was no talk of school. I was swimming against the tide at home, and societal expectations as well." As far as Mercado was concerned, triumph over adversity easily trumped test-score meritocracy.

More to the point, how can you be stigmatized if you don't feel it? Of course, the stigma hovers somewhere between the minority students who might feel it and the whites and Asians in whose eyes they would feel it. I did speak to one black student, Norell Giancana, who said, "When you want to start a study group, it's hard; there's a stigma that you're not as capable." Norell, who may have been unusually candid, considered this a genuine flaw of affirmative action. On the other hand, she said, "I don't think we're at a point in our society where we can do without it."

It would be convenient, for the critics, if affirmative action really harmed its beneficiaries; then you wouldn't be in the position of opposing the objective interests of many minority students. It would be equally convenient, for the supporters, if diversity really were a fundamental good and came at no expense to some other good — like merit — for then you could tell white and Asian students that they, too, came out ahead on balance. Alas, you can't. Affirmative action forces a complex calculus of costs and benefits. For all its goods, affirmative action violates a broadly held faith in the neutral principle of merit (however determined), judges people according to group membership rather than individual attributes, subtly reinforces racial and ethnic identity and infects the atmosphere with uneasy euphemisms. The consequences of eliminating it are cascading, which is serious but not tragic, and a new ethic of outreach and academic development, which is difficult but wonderful. You hope that this new ethic will help solve the problem in the long run; in the short run, there's that murky, if necessary, fiddling.

PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES, UNlike private ones, have traditionally selected candidates according to strict numerical performance: You awarded a certain amount of weight to S.A.T. scores and a certain amount to grade-point average or class rank, and you chose everyone who made it over a given threshold. (The rule did not apply, of course, to such sheltered categories as athletes or legacies or children of prominent state legislators.) Affirmative action was initially administered by simply selecting a lower threshold for minority students. Then the Bakke decision confused everything by prohibiting racial quotas and the dual admissions systems used to administer them, but permitting admissions departments to award minority students a "plus" factor in order to insure a "diverse student body." Most public universities, including Berkeley, continued to use a numerical grid, but now added a confusing additional layer of admissions criteria in which "diversity" earned applicants a certain number of bonus points. Even one prominent supporter of affirmative action says that the principal imperative of admissions departments in recent years has been "opacity." And conservatives have played a gleeful game of unmasking that exposes the yawning gaps in academic qualification that lie beneath the rhetoric of diversity and "special gifts" and so on.

The ending of affirmative action has provoked a feverish new round of innovations in admissions policy; the common theme is reducing the importance of the numerical grid and accepting students on a one-by-one basis, as elite private universities have long done. Thus,

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in the aftermath of Hopwood, the University of Texas invited applicants to describe whatever disadvantages might "put their achievements into context" and required two essays highlighting personal experience. "The process has nothing to do with race or ethnicity," says Bruce Walker, the director of admissions. It does, however, create the kind of opacity that makes admissions decisions almost unchallengeable. And though fewer minorities applied in the year Hopwood went into effect, Texas was able to accept the same fraction of them it had before.

In the aftermath of the regents' decision, the numbers crunchers in the central administration of the University of California tried valiantly to come up with some legitimate credential that they could select that would happen to correlate with race. They tried low socioeconomic status or first-in-the-family-to-go-to-college or some combination of the two; what they got were mostly working-class whites and Asians. The truth is that most affirmative action beneficiaries are only relatively disadvantaged. The average black student applying to the University of California comes from a family whose income is $38,000. (The figure for whites is $75,000.) Behind this fact lies an appalling statistic: nationwide, the average S.A.T. score of black students from the uppermost quarter of the socioeconomic scale is lower than the average score of whites or Asians from the *lowest* quarter. What this means is that impoverished black students are not even in the running, while middle-class students only do well enough to get into the affirmative action pool.

As affirmative action was being eliminated, Berkeley, like Texas, drafted new admissions criteria that were more "comprehensive" and "holistic" than they had been. Each file would be examined by two readers; students were to be evaluated on a range of academic and nonacademic achievements, personal qualities and on "diversity in personal background and experience." All achievements were to be considered "in the context of the opportunities an applicant has had, any hardships or unusual circumstances the applicant has faced and the ways in which he or she has responded to them." But the new formula produced a freshman class that was only 10.7 percent black and Chicano.

And so the admissions department tried something new. It distributed to readers a detailed profile of an applicant's high school, so that the reader could award greater weight to a student who succeeded despite attending a substandard school — who had, in effect, overcome educational rather than socioeconomic disadvantage. It suggested that readers consider S.A.T. scores "in light of each applicant's history and circumstances." And the new formula appears to have worked, increasing the fraction of minority students in the admitted pool to 13 percent.

Berkeley had, in effect, established a new form of merit that turned out to be mildly correlated with race and ethnicity. Was that bad? Jack Citrin, a professor of political science and one of the rare public opponents of affirmative action on the Berkeley faculty, quit the admissions committee when the new criteria were promulgated. "I don't think we're in the therapy business," Citrin says. "I think what we have happening here is an attack on the idea of merit as conventionally defined." On the other hand, Bob Laird, the director of admissions, observes, "When you look at the difference between the high-achieving and low-achieving high schools, they might as well be in two different worlds." It is, after all, a lot more impressive to excel in an environment where practically everyone is hellbent on failure than to do so in a school where success is taken for granted. One Chicano student I talked to, Hector Coronel, said that it was so unheard of at his high school to attend a top-ranked college that his counselor told him not to bother to apply to Berkeley. He did so, he said, "out of spite." Hector had a G.P.A. of only 3.1 and S.A.T.'s "under 1,000," but it was hard to begrudge his admission to Berkeley.

There is a real danger that state legislatures will react to the abolition of preferences by forcing elite institutions to lower their barriers to admit more of everyone. A post-Hopwood law requires the University of Texas to accept anyone who graduates in the top 10 percent of any state high school. A state legislator in California called for a similar law, but a study by the regents found that such a system would enroll thousands of vastly underprepared minority students. Instead, the regents agreed to accept the top 4 percent of graduates starting in 2001, and even then to exclude students who had not taken the required college-preparatory classes. This will raise the number of eligible black students by 30 percent and of Latinos by 24 percent, though it will do relatively little to cure their underrepresentation.

How should we feel about the murky, opaque fiddling that is bound to fill the vacuum created by the abolition of preferences? Critics like Lino Graglia, a professor at the University of Texas Law School, have ridiculed the idea that minority status is correlated with anything schools can actually select for, like "leadership abilities." Stephan Thernstrom says that admissions departments have simply "figured out how to circumvent the law," though he concedes that "whether you can ever deal with that through some legal means is a question." Thernstrom, like Graglia and Jack Citrin, holds the meritocratic principle sacred.

But perhaps we should accept a dent in meritocratic purity as a fair price for admitting students as individuals, not group members. This may turn out to be a very popular middle ground. I asked Bob Laird if, in retrospect, he now felt uncomfortable about the use of explicitly racial criteria, and he said, to my surprise: "From where we are now — yeah. When I look to what we were doing then — no."

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION IS not only a set of practices but also a way of thinking — about race and ethnicity, about merit, about elite institutions. And the truth is that it is not a way of thinking that even its advocates feel terribly comfortable about. In "The Ordeal of Integration," the Harvard scholar Orlando Patterson sweeps away every argument against affirmative action — and then calls for an end to the practice after 15 years, without offering any evidence that it won't be needed then. Implicit in Patterson's argument is the recognition that it cannot be good for black students to be seen as the perpetual beneficiaries of special treatment. More broadly, how can it be good for our collective selves to be handing out benefits on the basis of group identity rather than individual attainment?

Affirmative action lets schools off easy; eliminating it compels an act of self-scrutiny. Why is the failure rate among minority students so high? Why, in California, did the overall fraction of U.C.-eligible graduates drop from 12.3 percent in 1990 to 11.1 percent in 1996? Why did the figure for blacks drop from 5.1 percent to 2.8 percent? One answer is that the schools have been starved for funds; it is a quandary lost on no one that affirmative action was eliminated just as California was dropping to 49th place in state educational spending per capita. An equally valid answer is that in recent years state educators have run after every kind of faddish educational practice. It's hard to think of a more powerful corrective for the latter than the insistent focus on standards coming from people like Ray Orbach.

Whatever is lost with the elimination of affirmative action, what's gained is a new sense of mission for schools and universities. Riverside is considered one of the more "left" of the U.C. campuses; yet the left commitment there has to do with dedication to the painstaking work of improving minority performance. John Briggs, the head of Riverside's writing program, told me that he had begun driving around to high-school English departments 12 years ago, talking about the kind of curriculum that would prepare students for college and offering to bring teachers to the campus. Last year, he and 10 of his tenured faculty members visited 90 to 100 classrooms, and talked to 3,000 kids. "What affirmative action is supposed to be about," Briggs says, "is making a concerted effort to increase the pool of available students, and that means better preparation and better counseling." Ultimately, of course, that means better schools. ■

U.S. News and World Report, May 31, 1999

The Feds Strike Back

By JOHN LEO

Non-Asian minorities tend to score lower on standardized tests used for college admissions than do Asian-Americans and whites. The obvious answer to this gap is better schools in minority neighborhoods and better study habits. But the Clinton administration has a quicker fix: Let's just declare the tests invalid.

The draft of a new "resource guide" by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights says that "the use of any educational test which has a significant disparate impact on members of any particular race, national origin, or sex is discriminatory" unless the school using the test can prove otherwise. That makes almost all educational tests suspect. Specifically, the department is warning that the SAT and ACT tests are presumed to be invalid if they are a significant basis for college admissions and financial-aid decisions that fail to produce proportional representation by race and gender.

The department says the guide is merely a useful "synthesis of settled law," but it is surely one of the four or five most amazing positions taken by the Clinton administration. As usual, the administration acted with a stunning lack of candor and straightforwardness: no public announcement, a ho-hum pretense that staking out a radical position is just business as usual, word casually passed to colleges that they have just four workdays to respond (lengthened until the end of the summer after protests).

The Chronicle of Higher Education Web site says that officials are "reeling" from the announcement. No wonder. It's an attempt to decapitate traditional assessments of merit at a single stroke and push the colleges to accept large numbers of applicants who are well below their standards. The department is in effect saying that colleges using standardized tests can expect to be called in for long and grueling interrogations that most of us would call harassment. Terry Pell of the Center for Individual Rights calls this "an extralegal form of bureaucratic terrorism."

War of attrition. Sample questions from the draft guidelines: Has the school developed its own evidence that the procedure is valid? What is the form of evidence? Who conducted the study and how recently was it done? For what use was the test or assessment procedure validated? Answer these and the department will offer dozens more to wear you down.

The intent seems to be to bully schools into dropping tests, or at least de-emphasizing them. That would be the only sure way to avoid the legal costs, the withering interrogations, and the threat of losing federal funding. Turning more and more to subjective admissions criteria–essays, extracurricular activities, "life experiences"–would allow more minorities to gain admission over higher-scoring Asians and whites. But only a dishonest use of subjective factors is likely to change the numbers a lot. And subjectivity would open the schools to more litigation and federal complaints over bias, not less. The education department would surely be back in the face of the colleges asking for an explanation of subjective standards that don't produce rough racial quotas.

The text is vague about how much impact a test must have to be regarded as suspect. All it must do is to "contribute to a disproportionate denial of an educational benefit or opportunity." People who intend to bully like to use vague and broad language so that the victim will surely be guilty of something.

Does the administration really think this plan will fly? Maybe the idea is to provide cover for colleges to back away from standards and toward more affirmative action while saying that they are being forced to do so under federal pressure. Not all colleges are "reeling" at the prospect of more racial preferences.

Perhaps the real intent is to soften up the public and the courts for heavier doses of disparate-impact theory. The text opens the door to using the theory to rearrange every aspect of education, from professors' grades, final exams, and the racial makeup of faculty to the new standards being set for public schools in many states. All cutoffs of test scores would surely be depicted as grossly unfair: A college that requires a 1300 score would have to explain why a student with a 1290 score couldn't expect to succeed at the institution. Control of these matters would pass from schools and local governments to the courts and the federal bureaucracy.

Then again, the obvious is true: In Democratic administrations, the posts of civil rights chief at the Education and Justice departments are the two key outposts of the cultural left in Washington. These jobs, currently held by Norma Cantú and Bill Lann Lee, are conceived as platforms to pursue (mostly behind the scenes) a heavy ideological agenda built around race and gender preferences and proportional representation. The president speaks like a moderate and plays to majority opinion, but the two appointees reliably head in a different direction, mostly unnoticed. In this case, it's important for the Republicans to wake up and hold congressional hearings on what the Clinton administration really has in mind for our schools.

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National Review, May 17, 1999

The Graduates

Do too many kids go to college?

JAMES BOWMAN

HOLDEN CAULFIELD once pointed out that Pencey Prep's claim that "since 1888 we have been molding boys into splendid, clear-thinking young men" was "strictly for the birds," since "I didn't know anybody there that was splendid and clear-thinking and all. Maybe two guys. If that many. And they probably *came* to Pencey that way." Then as now those who spend a lot of money for educational prestige don't really require the splendidness and clear thinking as advertised. They know that what they learn at places like Pencey will matter far less than the fact that they have been there. But what has always been true for the educational elites is now true for the prestige-seeking masses. Nowadays, even quite humble state universities are selling prestige—not the prestige of brand-name institutions but the generic prestige given by our credential-obsessed culture simply associated with having been to "college."

Now that even many unskilled, entry-level jobs require a college degree, while a high-school diploma does not even guarantee basic literacy, this qualification is a sort of passport to white-collar status—and to cold, hard cash. In 1997, for example, the average college graduate earned $40,478 while the average high-school graduate earned only $22,895. And the value of a college education is continuing to increase. Degree-holders can now expect to earn 76 percent more than those without a degree, whereas in 1975 the difference

Mr. Bowman is the American editor of the *Times Literary Supplement*.

between their respective earnings prospects was only 57 percent. High-school graduates in 1975 could expect to earn 92 percent of the average wage; now that figure is only 77 percent.

Hardly surprising then that in 1996, 27 percent of the college-age population was attending college, whereas in 1975 only 20 percent was. The more people go, the more they think they have to go. But does a university degree amount to anything more than an essential line on a résumé? Does it imply any substantive attainment whatsoever? In a study of the available data on this question in the journal *Academic Questions*, Daniel Casse and Bruno V. Manno note that "the population that graduates from

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Degree holders can now expect to earn 76 percent more than those without a degree.

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two-year and four-year postsecondary institutions may be self-selecting. It may be the subset of the population that, prior to any college experience, already possesses higher literacy levels and the requisite skills to obtain more lucrative employment . . . Compared to children who do not attend college, those who subsequently graduate from college come from wealthier homes, have more highly educated parents, and demonstrate stronger math and verbal skills before they receive any postsecondary training." In other words, like the one or two splendid and clear-thinking boys at Pencey Prep, they probably came there that way. As Edwin S. Rubenstein of the Hudson Institute argues, the studies that seem to suggest a huge gap between college-educated and high-school-educated wage earners do not control for the different socioeconomic backgrounds and IQs of the two groups.

Studies that do control for these factors indicate that the value added by college itself is only about 15 percent. But the illusion of "lucrative employment" to be won by a college education leads students into ruinous debt and devalues their education still further by attracting far too many unqualified stu-

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dents into higher education, so feeding the vicious cycle by which "college" comes to seem a necessity when it manifestly is not.

Naturally the Clinton administration, which justly regards the professoriat as one of its most loyal constituencies, is encouraging this misuse of social resources with more money for higher education in the form of the president's signature "Hope" scholarships. These amount to $1,500 in tax credits for the first two years of higher education, but their real effect was indicated when Richard Riley, the secretary of education, recently wrote to university heads asking them not to take the opportunity of the new money available to raise tuitions. Of course that is exactly what they will do and are doing already. California, which enacted a tuition cut last year, is now set to raise its rates again so as to "increase the effective federal subsidy of California's higher education programs."

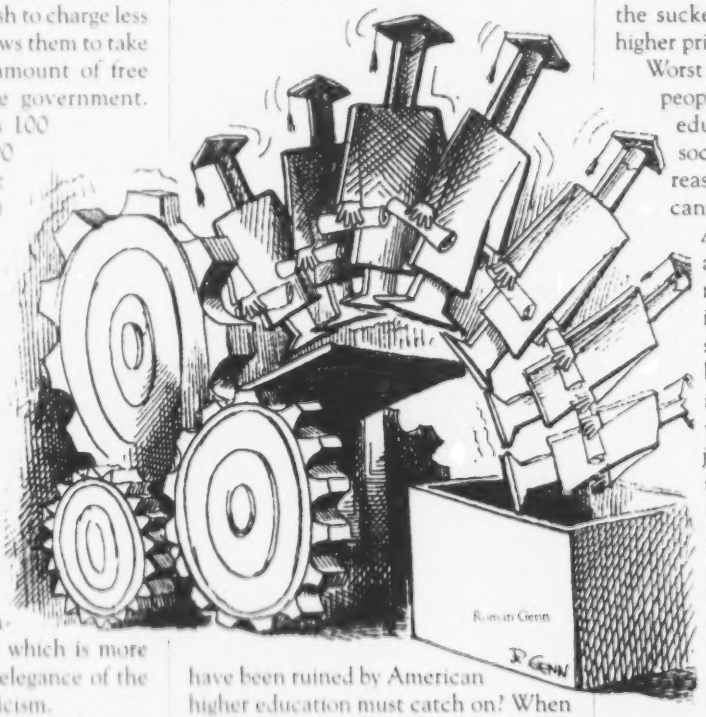
As the *Wall Street Journal* points out, public universities like those in California would be foolish to charge less than the $2,000 that allows them to take full advantage of the amount of free money provided by the government. (The scholarship covers 100 percent of the first $1,000 of tuition and 50 percent of the second $1,000.) Yet this gift from the Treasury to mainly Democratic and often radically left-wing academics is politically foolproof, since college-educated but dim-witted soccer moms, convinced that their children face a choice between college and the gutter, continue to believe that they have received a benefit from their president in Washington. It is hard to tell which is more impressive, the political elegance of the program or its moral cynicism.

Can people ever be disabused of the notion that they are actually getting something valuable for the vast sums they spend on higher education? So far it seems not. College admissions officers are beating the applicants off with sticks. According to the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, at colleges across the country dormitories are full and the overflow are being packed into hotels—and this at a time when tuition costs are increasing at more than double the rate of inflation. In fact, according to Richard Vedder, professor of economics at Ohio

The most scandalous source of cash in which the system is awash comes from the debt students eagerly incur.

University, "In the past decade and a half, tuition costs have increased 195.3 percent while the overall consumer price index has risen just 63.3 percent." In other words, students are paying more and getting less for their money.

This is only what should be expected when demand is so heavy, but surely eventually even those whose brains



have been ruined by American higher education must catch on? When the news came out last October that tuition costs had risen by 4 percent in the previous year, two and a half times the rate of inflation, the universities scarcely even bothered to try to justify the increase. George Rupp, president of Columbia University, told the *New Yo Times* that one reason was "updatir dormitories and dining halls to keep u with the demands of students and the parents for standards that increasing seek to match those of hotels ar restaurants."

The most scandalous source of tl cash in which the system is awash com from the debt students are pathetical eager to incur in order to go to "college As tuitions are increasing, most finar cial aid now comes in the form of loan and increasingly unsubsidized one Loans are now 60 percent of financi aid where twenty years ago they wer about 40 percent. This means that th universities are putting the squeeze o their cash cow—the thing that responsible for the explosion in colleg costs over the last quarter-centur namely the realization in the 1970s tha the qualification they were offering ha become so valuable that students wer willing to take out a lien on their future to get it. The universities didn't have t hike tuition at all. They did so becau the suckers keep coming, even at th higher prices.

Worst of all, perhaps, is that the mos people are pitchforked into highe education for economic an social rather than for education reasons, the more *lower* educatio can get away with not doin Already, remedial education a huge part of the college cu riculum, even at many eli institutions. If you add in th stuff that is not called remedi but would have been covere already if public high schoo were doing an even adequa job, you begin to realize that, substance, what people a willing to pay so highly for mostly only what they hav already paid for (though n received) through local pro erty taxes devoted to educ tion.

What a racket! Conserv tives should lead the way calling attention to it, in hiring tho who have the courage and good sense stay out of college, and in fighting ever attempt, public or private, to put mor money in the hands of the educatio establishment.

The Wall Street Journal, April 1, 1999

'College Is Better Than No College, Period. You'll Thank Me Later'

With a 100% Acceptance Rate, A Brazen Counselor Tries For Repeat Performance

Beyond Jobs With Paper Hats

By Ron Suskind
Staff Reporter of The Wall Street Journal

NEW YORK – Because Kathy Morgan believes in the Christian doctrine of free will, she offers her students at All Hallows Catholic High School a *choice* about their future.

"So, you want to get out of the South Bronx?" she asks 17-year-old Brian Seymour, who just slumped into a chair in her pin-neat office. No response. She waits. "Yo, Brian. It's a simple yes or no."

"Umm, yes, Ms. Morgan," says Brian, who has no parents, a home on a nightmare street and a class rank of 88th . . . out of 88 seniors. "I mean, I definitely want to get out. Who wouldn't?"

"Fine, I'll take it from here," she says, all business and in-your-face, as she shoves an application form for all the state universities of New York across her desk. "Have this back to me tomorrow morning. First thing, or I'll come looking for you."

There are many people at All Hallows – a three-story brick box under a statue of the Virgin Mary, hard beside an open-air drug market – involved in the effort to send every one of All Hallows' 88 seniors to college. But none is more brazen than Kathy Morgan, the school's lone college-placement counselor.

A College Try

Last year, initiatives led by Ms. Morgan somehow got all of All Hallows' seniors accepted to four year colleges, an astonishing 100%. The struggle, as spring approaches, is to do the same for this year's senior class, despite their average combined SAT score of 870 out of 1,600, despite the fact that nearly two-thirds are from single-parent families and are on public assistance, despite the opposing tug of relentless mayhem all around.

"I'm not a particularly religious person," says Ms. Morgan, a 39-year-old with a Brooklyn accent and a demeanor that might be called Rosie O'Donnell with an edge. "But I figure God must really have a sense of humor to drop me in this spot. On celestial television, this has got to be a hit sitcom. This week on 'Morgan in Hell,' Kathy runs screaming through the halls. . . ."

This week – the first in March – Morgan is hustling to save her last stragglers, a handful of students who have ducked, faked, hid and otherwise managed to elude her grasp. Her mission is to guide them past problems with confused, often beleaguered parents and rigid, by-the-book teachers toward a foreign idea: that they actually belong in college.

That idea – that notion of what is possible for poor black and Latino kids – flowered at All Hallows only after years of slow growth. The school, which opened near Yankee Stadium in 1931, was flirting with a wrecking ball six years ago. There were sound reasons for it to close – high drop-out rates, fewer than 20% of graduates going to college, an inability to attract teachers – that stemmed from familiar shifts during the last century in large American cities.

It is an urban history that is bound to the history of the school. In the 1930s, All Hallows was a home for poor or lower-middle-class Catholic kids – Irish, mostly, some Italian – who lived along the Bronx's Grand Concourse. The Christian Brothers, then a robust order housing 25 at the school, were educators with a penchant for discipline. They drilled students on the classics and carried leather straps in the deep pockets of their robes. For any infraction, kids held out their palms.

"I'd stand in the back of the line, so by the time they'd get to me, their arms would be tired," says Walter O'Hara, 63, looking down at his palms as though they might still be red. "We knew what was expected of us. No questions asked. I'm a product of that place." By the time he graduated in 1952, Mr. O'Hara recalls that the neighborhood had already risen to "more of a middle-class area, very nice, with Irish, Jewish and Italian, mostly. The Yankee ballplayers kept apartments at a hotel on the Grand Concourse, which was like Broadway, like Fifth Avenue."

Mr. O'Hara, unearthing memories, gazes out the window of his managing director's office at Allen & Co., the investment bank, which overlooks Fifth Avenue, as he recalls getting word in 1993 that his old school was failing. The neighborhood had long since become famous more for blight than baseball. "It wasn't the school I'd known. And those kids may look different than we did, but that shouldn't make a difference. We were allowed to get to the plate to take three good swings. Those kids deserve three good swings, too."

He called other Irish-American investment bankers, many of them All Hallows alumni, and raised money to keep the school open. Soon, facilities were upgraded, a new administration was hired, and a bridge was stretched between one

Please Turn to Page A8, Column 1

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Continued From First Page

group who made good from the Bronx and another fighting just to make it out.

It remains a rickety bridge. The school is supported almost exclusively on about $1.3 million raised each year in donations, and the recent college-acceptance rates—though stunning—are the result of a sort of academic trapeze act, without net, effected each day in the halls.

Ms. Morgan, like most All Hallows teachers, is the product of no-nonsense Catholic schools. The nuns at her all-girls academy, she says, "were always in your face. it was, 'Do it, or else.' " Such lessons came in handy, years later, when she worked as a college basketball coach, a physical-education teacher at Manhattan's plush Columbia Preparatory School and, eventually, an English teacher at a school in impoverished Monterey, Mexico.

Returning to New York in 1995, she recalls having an "irresistible profile: single, Irish-Catholic girl—no job, no life, no future. Last resort for all the wayward, of course, is to call the archdiocese. So, they tell me, 'Well, let's see, now . . . we've got something in the South Bronx.' I said, 'You better give me directions.' "

Ms. Morgan began to experiment with her role in 1996. The Christian Brothers and Mr. O'Hara had just hired a new principal. Thirty-five kids were expelled that year, sending a strong message to students. A mandatory daily reading period for the whole school was instituted.

'You Want Diversity?'

But discipline only went so far, Ms. Morgan recalls. Most of the kids "weren't even applying to go anywhere. Lots of them would just graduate and go back to the streets. But I heard colleges all talking about 'real diversity,' both racial and economic. So, I figure, 'You want diversity? I'll give you diversity.' " She planned for six top students to secretly visit Holy Cross College, the competitive, mostly white college in Worcester, Mass., where she had developed some contacts.

When All Hallows' new principal, Sean Sullivan, found out about the trip, he objected, saying there was no way they would be accepted to such a selective college. They went anyway. A few months later, acceptance letters came back: six for six. "We were all shocked," Mr. Sullivan says now. "After that, I told Kathy, 'Keep doing whatever it is you're doing. I'm giving you an open field. Just go crazy.' "

She did. All Hallows, like many urban schools, forces juniors to take a class in SAT preparation. Ms. Morgan created a second curricular requirement: the writing of a college-application essay. "Just to make sure, I gave them a couple of models. The thing is, these kids really have something to write about," says Ms. Morgan, who has all the essays neatly filed in her desk drawer before senior year begins. She pulls out this year's thick folder and starts flipping pages. "Look at these, one after another—shootings, drug-dealing, wanting to find a better life in America. How can you say 'no' to these essays?"

Initiatives were launched to gather teacher recommendations and financial-aid forms by the end of junior year. For the latter, Ms. Morgan regularly interrupts classes with this message: "Listen, I don't care if you get into Harvard. You don't fill out the financial-aid forms, you won't be going anywhere except that Burger King down the street to spend the next 25 years in that really attractive paper hat." She bundles applications and sends them off herself—hundreds of them.

It is odd that so much authority would be seized by a guidance counselor, so often a sleepy custodian of college-application materials at many better schools. In fact, she is one of three guidance counselors, each of whom has a full plate of social-work responsibilities. But it is the way Ms. Morgan has elevated her added job, college counselor, into the endgame of years of work by countless teachers on behalf of students that has won her such clout.

"The difference with Kathy Morgan," says Mr. O'Hara of Allen & Co., "is that she views what she does in an entrepreneurial way. I'm used to seeing entrepreneurs who are forceful about their ideas. In her area, though, you don't find many people who take control."

Of course, most guidance counselors respect the autonomy of their students. Ms. Morgan says that is a luxury her students can't afford. "When it comes to their futures, you can't rely on them getting direction from elsewhere. Look, often there are no parents at home, or parents who have no idea what's outside of South Bronx. I have to make decisions. College is better than no college, period. So, I tell them, 'I've picked out a couple of colleges you can get accepted to and that's where you're going. You'll thank me later, when you're president.' "

The Stragglers

After a year poking and prodding the class of 1999, some seniors have started getting letters of acceptance. Meanwhile, time is running out for her last two stragglers, Brian Seymour and Andres Sierra, who haven't yet applied anywhere.

A stream of crises washes across her desk. A kid comes in who doesn't know what his mother does, so he can't fill out the financial-aid form. Ms. Morgan deadeyes him: "Ask her about her job . . . tonight!" An administrator arrives with bad news: A top student has been suspended for skipping school and forging a note from his mother. A meeting is scheduled with the school's dean of discipline. Expulsion is possible. "Don't worry," Ms. Morgan tells the administrator. "This kid's had some problems at home and he's got good numbers. No one's touching him. He's looking at college, not expulsion." He seems relieved, knowing—as she does—that everything is now secondary to imminent college acceptances.

As the afternoon passes, she works the phones. New York has particularly strong educational-opportunity programs that help her get application fees waived and get kids who are academically and finan-

cially underprivileged into colleges in New York. For out-of-state schools like Holy Cross, results mostly come through brow beating. Those first six, trailblazing kids who were accepted into Holy Cross in 1996, actually ended up going to Notre Dame University, Middlebury College, Skidmore College and Trinity College, all of which offered generous financial-aid packages. The next year, Ms. Morgan made copies of each college's package and sent them to Holy Cross. "I told them, here's what your competition is doing," she says. "You want my kids, get with the program." Last year, Holy Cross did, enhancing its financial-aid packages for six 1998 graduates, all of whom enrolled.

Sitting at her desk, Ms. Morgan calls up the Holy Cross admissions office to talk about this year's applicants and check on alumni who are now students. "Everyone OK up there?" she asks pensively, part of the regular checkups she does on previous graduates who are now in college. The admissions official, who administers programs for underprivileged students, assures her all All Hallows graduates are still enrolled and thriving.

'Once They Can Clear Their Heads'

She hangs up, relieved. "I'm always nervous that they'll fail when they get to college. But they never seem to. It's amazing. I've got kids with combined SATs of 600 who are at colleges. Not Yale. Decent places, though. People gasp about this. But the kids do fine. What I've learned is that our kids are incredibly adaptable, ingenious at survival, and they can't afford to fail. Once they get away from the madness of their lives in South Bronx—once they can clear their damn heads—they eventually figure things out. That's what I tell the colleges. Give them a little time, they'll do you proud. The colleges are finally figuring that out."

Of the several hundred students she has placed, she has had time to personally check up on at least three-quarters, she says, all of whom are still in college. She says she has heard of a couple of kids who have moved between colleges, and a handful—she estimates only four or five—who have dropped out. The next morning at 8:15 in the cafeteria, Ms. Morgan plucks caps off students' heads before homeroom (no hats are allowed in the school) as she spots her prey: "You got something for me?"

Brian Seymour hands her his completed application. "Surprised?" he says.

"Not in the least, my man," she says. "This is all I need."

After the strong start, though, Brian's day soon collapses. He gets into a verbal exchange with a teacher and is ejected from class. Teachers and administrators—Ms. Morgan included—huddle. They recognize that Brian is under acute stress: altercations at school with teachers and students, academic pressures, and worries about the elderly aunt who raised him and has severe diabetes. They set up a program of tutoring and after-class work to get him to graduation.

After an hour in after-school study—a time for quiet reading and homework for kids who failed two or more classes in the previous marking period—Brian walks into the nearly empty halls. He'd rather not see anyone. He'd like to just edge out and let this day be over with. And he does, slipping out onto a sunny sidewalk in front of the school, taking a deep breath.

Ms. Morgan files in behind him. He turns, surprised.

"Tough day, huh?" she says.

"Yeah, not so good," he mumbles, looking away.

"You're going to make it. Right?" she says, blocking his path. "We agreed. Right?"

"I hope so, Ms. Morgan. I hope so." He meets her gaze.

Back in her office a moment later, she bores in on her other straggler. Andres Sierra, ranked 64, disappeared from All Hallows in January when his mother couldn't pay $500 in tuition for the semester. After a few days at the Bronx's Taft High School, with its metal detectors and chaos, an alumnus paid Andres's tuition and he returned to school. Now, Ms. Morgan is pressing him on her single issue: "In three months you're going to walk down the aisle at graduation, so—the question—what will you be doing in September?"

Andres is ready: "Marines."

"No way, you're not going to the Marines." Ms. Morgan recently pulled two seniors out of the Navy. Both are now accepted to college.

Andres, a handsome kid who works after school at a health club, and is anxious to get to his job, seems confused. "But . . . I sort of decided."

"All right, why do you want to go into the Marines?"

He says that his older brother is in the Marines and "says it's pretty good and all." She closes the door and, over the next 15 minutes, probes Andres's psyche, eventually learning that Andres's mother actually wants to him to go to college and that his brother, whom he looks up to, isn't all that happy in the Marines.

"Guess what, Andres? You're going to learn from your brother's mistakes."

He laughs and fumbles with his blue All Hallows sweater—mandatory here—and his Mickey Mouse tie. She pulls out his SATs: 360 verbal, 200 math. "Let me guess—you were flirting with some girl in the test center." He blushes. "Two of them." She closes the deal. "All right, you're taking the SATs again at the end of March and you're filling out this college-application form and bringing it to me in the morning." She shoves it in his hand. The room is quiet. Andres sits for a moment, uncertain. "You really think I can go to college?" he says tentatively, having dropped his cool shield.

Ms. Morgan gets up, walks around the desk, and puts her hand on his shoulder. "College, right now, looks like Mount Everest. It's not. It's a gentle hill, long but gentle—and you, my man, are going all the way up. For the rest of the day and tonight, I want you to say, 'I'm going to college.' See how good it feels."

Grab Bag

Kicking off our Grab Bag section is an instructive article by Christian Peters. Writing in *The Washington Monthly*, he explains "What The Public Can Learn From Hollywood And George W. Bush." The entertainment industry's shift from the 1940's highly centralized, top-down factory model to the deregulated, focused-on-a-hit model that we know today provides a lesson for public education. Free up the process, give directors and stars (principals and teachers) "creative freedom for which they are expected to generate a hit movie or TV series. If they do they get renewed. If they don't they're homeless. Simple." Of course, one might wonder, will this work in schools, too? Peters points to the example of Texas and George W. Bush to demonstrate that it can.

Also making a plug for accountability in the pages of *The Washington Monthly* is James Heaney. In "Easy Pickings," he takes Buffalo school administrators to task for receiving the city's highest public salaries while being held the least accountable for results. Heaney cites shocking statistics: Seventy-five school administrators made more in 1996-97 than the mayor; seventeen principals made more than the police commissioner, and so on. These salaries would be less shocking if these school officials were getting results.

We finish with a little chemical stimulation. What should we make of kids on Ritalin? Mary Eberstadt tells us in "Why Ritalin Rules," published in *Policy Review*. According to Eberstadt, Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), the condition that elicits a prescription for Ritalin, is overly diagnosed and has, in effect, become the ailment du jour for white, middle-class folks. Why? Ritalin provides all kinds of benefits, some physiological—a drug-induced energy surge, far stronger than a Starbucks grande mochaccino—and some academic—untimed tests (SATs and LSATs included). Then there's the lure of cash: Supplemental Security Insurance (SSI), courtesy of Uncle Sam, because of this "disability." Eberstadt is less than sanguine about Ritalin's effects—it mimics cocaine—and the ambiguity of the diagnostic process, which can be easily manipulated.

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The Washington Monthly, May 1999

What The Public Schools Can Learn From Hollywood And George W. Bush

BY CHRISTIAN PETERS

I AM A MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHER IN SAN Bernardino, Calif.; a small blue collar city out where the eastern fringe of the Southern California sprawl begins to dissipate into the Mojave desert. I have been at it for five years now and truly love my work more and more each year. And just as much, I like the people I work with. Teachers are by and large the most caring, decent and altruistic group you'll find anywhere. Yet one thing has increasingly nagged at me over the five years I have taught. It has to do with my life before teaching.

Prior to becoming a teacher, I was an aspiring screenwriter living in Los Angeles and circulating through the hustling, scuffling fringes of the entertainment industry. During those Hollywood wannabe days there were three people who, in retrospect, embody for me the creative, optimistic, resourceful best of The Business. Far from being the hot shot, Tarentino-esque prodigies I most envied at the time, they were Jay, Mike, and Ed, my co-workers in the wire service room at the hyper-conservative *Investor's Business Daily* where I supported myself by clipping articles and writing quarterly report summaries. They were like me, aspiring something-or-others in their twenties; Jay from Pennsylvania, Mike from England and Ed from Michigan. They were a few of the thousands of young people from all over the country who populate Los Angeles' west side, toiling in restaurants, video stores, back offices and telemarketing boiler rooms while pursuing their writing, acting, directing, producing, songwriting, or maybe all-of-the-above dreams in their spare time.

CHRISTIAN PETERS *is a public school teacher in San Bernardino, California.*

What was truly wonderful about Jay, Mike, and Ed though was the way that they would bring that otherwise achingly dull workplace to life. Virtually every morning one or the other of them would come barreling into the office nearly exploding with the story idea, sitcom character, cartoon, or song he'd stayed up late the night before composing. And not only were they eager to share their own ideas, when they didn't have any of their own they would relentlessly pester me to share pages from whatever screenplay I was working on. They were forever on the lookout for an opportunity to collaborate or form a partnership. Indeed, one of the things that made me realize I wasn't cut out for the movie biz was seeing how much harder these guys hustled than I was willing to.

Now, five years later, despite my being engaged in a more satisfying profession with more nobly intentioned colleagues, I find myself ... well ... missing Jay, Mike, and Ed. Not that there aren't teachers as creative and dynamic as they were. It's just that I have a hard time finding anyone who is eager to share new ideas or seek any kind of feedback whatsoever on his or her work.

Now I have plenty of friends among my current co-workers. Indeed, I know and chat easily with all of them and socialize with many of them. But I have hardly a clue what they do in their classrooms, what they are accomplishing or not accomplishing, or what I could learn from any of them.

So much is the organization of secondary school curriculum and the school day still a compartmentalized, factory-like industrial-age artifact that, like an assembly line worker, I spend my days entirely isolated in my little assembly bay (classroom) absorbed in slamming rivets of knowledge into the literally hun-

dreds of kids who sail by me at 45-minute intervals. I have little time to think or involve myself with anything else or—even worse than an assembly line—any way of assessing or finding out if my rivets have held in place.

In public education, there is little time and even less incentive for teachers to exchange ideas, critique and push each other as aspiring screenwriters do in Hollywood. Indeed, among many teachers it's considered almost a faux pas to inquire too much into what they actually do in their classrooms or to ask to observe one of them; an intrusion on the order of asking about their religion or their sex life. Teaching's dirty secret is that we're all intensely insecure and uncertain of just what the hell it is we're supposed to be doing in those classrooms. At worst, we suspect that everybody else knows what we're supposed to be doing except us.

In public education, there is little time and even less incentive for teachers to exchange ideas, critique, and push each other as aspiring screenwriters do in Hollywood.

What Hollywood can teach our schools lies in the passion of Jay, Mike, and Ed and their motivation, even as relatively self-centered people, to share and push and collaborate with one another. It is also directly traceable to an upheaval that took place in the entertainment industry 40 years ago. Over an amazingly brief time during the 1950s and early '60s, the major Hollywood studios were forced to completely redefine their role in the movie making business. As the '50s began, the studios were structured along a highly centralized, top-down, factory model, much as the vast majority of school districts and individual school sites still are today. But with the Paramount antitrust decision of 1949 and the simultaneous advent of television and the increased power of big stars, independent producers, and talent agents, the studios were forced to alter their structure drastically in order to survive.

What they did was stop doing the things they could no longer do effectively—control talent and the creative process—and focus on what they could still uniquely do: provide independent producers with cash and access to the vast technical and distribution infrastructure they still commanded. A new system therefore evolved whereby independent production companies (run by dynamic, creative, risk-taking Jay, Mike, and Eds) contract with studios based on their proven track records to produce a given number of films over a given period of time. They are budgeted, given office space on studio lots and almost total creative freedom in return for which they are expected to generate a hit movie or TV series. If they do they get renewed. If they don't, they're homeless. Simple.

Now whether this structure is a good formula for artistic success or even for the mental health of its participants is open to debate. What is not open to debate, however, is its monumental economic success. During the past 25 years—often referred to as the "Blockbuster era"—the profits of most of the "Big Seven" studios have grown at a greater rate than during any equivalent period in history. And most importantly, it's a system that draws more and more bright, ambitious, nervy Jays, Mikes, and Eds to L.A. every year; people willing to work their asses off for years—despite the slim odds of success and near-certain prospect of poverty and repeated rejection—in hopes of eventually landing a big studio development deal.

Is there anything the virtuous world of public education can learn from these on-the-make Hollywood types? Consider that the nation's school system today is still arguably at the same place the studio system was 40 years ago. It is stuck in an industrial-age organizational structure that is widely perceived as no longer getting the job done. The only difference is that while the old studio system failed because it could no longer maintain iron control over the creative means of production, in the case of the school system, the problem is the ambiguity of the product itself. That is, the main difference between schools now and schools say, 25 years ago, is that they are expected to educate a vastly increased and more diverse population of students while at the same time addressing the particular needs of an ever-increasing number of special groups. Obviously this makes the standardized, centralized, assembly line approach to education, which worked so well for the better part of the century, entirely obsolete.

So how would the Hollywood approach apply to schools? Easy. Just like the studios in the '50s and '60s, school districts and state education bureaucracies need to stop trying to do what they can no longer do well—mandate educational strategies for addressing

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an impossible diversity of educational needs—and focus on what they can do well: allocate resources and monitor and reward achievement (i.e. improved school achievement = hit movies), thereby freeing the front-line troops at the school sites to figure out the best way of meeting their students' needs while still being held accountable to the bottom line.

There are currently only a few states, most of them southern and conservative such as Texas, Kentucky, South Carolina, and Virginia, that have taken steps toward this approach. The furthest along and most demonstrably successful of these states appears to be, believe it or not, Texas under the leadership of, believe it or not, George W. Bush. There the state has largely withdrawn from the business of mandating curriculum approaches and focused almost entirely on establishing strict, concrete standards of achievement that every school is expected to meet.

For instance, when Bush is asked about his position on bilingual education, instead of proffering the expected conservative-nativist boiler plate, he regularly surprises listeners by saying he really doesn't care how schools choose to teach as long as they show concrete results. That's state policy. Schools, like Hollywood production companies, are given near-total freedom to produce a successful product in the manner they see fit and are in return expected to produce concrete results in the form of improved standardized test scores. If they succeed, dollars, resources and recognition flow their way. If they fail, they risk state takeover and the firing or forced transfer of their faculty and administrators. Simple. What's more, the evidence dramatically suggests that this approach is working. Texas' students performance on standardized tests have risen to consistently place in the top 10 nationwide. Meanwhile my own state, California, with a nearly identical socioeconomic spread and ethnic diversity, continues to languish in the bottom 10. It is no coincidence that the California education hierarchy also continues to issue endless top-down prescriptive edicts while failing to hold schools accountable for maintaining any ironclad standards.

Fortunately, Congress brought the rest of us a step closer to the Texas approach by passing the Education Flexibility Partnership Act of 1999. The "Ed-Flex" bill permits all 50 states to waive some of the burdensome regulations that are currently attached to federal aid for schools. But it's too early to tell what kind of effect the bill will have. Many states may shrink from the kind of strict accountability Texas has imposed, largely because the four main influence groups in education—school administrators, teachers' unions, conservative politicians and "the education elite" (education professors and writers)—don't like Texas' outcome-based approach.

Administrators don't like it because it diminishes their role. Unions (along with the liberal politicians with whom they are closely aligned) don't like it because they feel it leads down the slippery slope toward pitting teacher against teacher. Many conservative politicians are still suspicious of it because it allows teachers too much freedom to pursue liberal agendas such as bilingual classrooms and "whole language" reading instruction. Finally, intellectuals don't like it because they view the standardized tests upon which the state standards are primarily based as crass political raw meat that has little to do with the development of the "whole child."

All of these arguments have some merit, but they all equally fail to see the scarier writing on the wall in the form of private school voucher initiatives, the growth in private school enrollment in general by those who can afford it, and even the dramatic growth in home schooling that recently merited a *Newsweek* cover story. As the studio moguls realized in the '50s, the system was changing with or without them, and they had to do something to drastically alter the way they did business. The Progressive era education system in this country is fast fading and will eventually disappear as surely as did the old studio system of the 1920s - '50s. And education must change just as Hollywood did.

The Washington Monthly, May 1999

Easy Pickings

Few public officials are better paid—or less accountable—than school administrators

BY JAMES HEANEY

MOST BUFFALO SCHOOL administrators are former teachers who have learned that there is good money to be made running a poor district. School officials accounted for 81 of the city's 100 highest paid administrators in 1996-97.

How much better paid are school administrators than their city government counterparts? Seventy-five made more in 1996-97 than Mayor Anthony Masiello, who ranked 91st overall among city administrators. The schools' top budget official earned nearly $24,000 more than the mayor's chief number cruncher. Seventeen principals made more than the police commissioner, including four who pulled down more than $100,000. Even the School Board's secretary made more than most of the city government's top administrators; Alvina Staley earned $63,189, much of it in overtime, and her pay topped those of the commissioners of parks, streets, and community development.

Sixty-five percent of the administrators in the city who made over $65,000 work for the schools. In 1996-97, 191 school administrators were paid more than $65,000, including 40 who earned more than $80,000. Superintendent James Harris topped the list: His $135,000 salary makes him the city's highest paid public official. Benefits for city school administrators are vastly superior to those of the mayor's management staff. School administrators who retired the summer of 1996, for example, walked away with an average of $49,940 in early retirement incentives and compensation for unused sick time; department heads in the city get nothing when they leave.

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While the city high school principals' pay—$94,486—is higher than those in the suburbs, most of their students' academic performance is not. Most city high schools are at the bottom of the achievement ladder among schools. Student performance is not tied to principals' pay.

The district's administrators rank among the best paid managers in city government—and the least accountable. They're rarely evaluated. And forget about demotions or dismissals. All but a handful have what amounts to lifetime job security. Even assistant superintendents are members of a union and expected to supervise and, if necessary, discipline fellow members of their union.

The situation in Buffalo is worse than in many other districts, but in many ways it typifies the entrenched bureaucrats found in school systems throughout the nation. "I think the public education system is about as unaccountable as anything the human mind has conceived," says Joe Nathan, director of the Center for School Change at the University of Minnesota. "What's happened in Buffalo and a number of other places is that the preferences of adults have become more important than the needs of children. Our school systems are fundamentally set up as employment agencies rather than educational institutions."

Buffalo City Comptroller Joel Giambra complains that there's no link between the high salaries being earned by school administrators and the performance of their students. The district usually evaluates new administrators before they're granted permanent status after three years on the job, but the evaluation criteria is fuzzy, and it's rare that anyone is turned down. A curriculum audit conducted in March 1997 by a team of national experts found a haphazard and incomplete evaluation process. Auditors randomly pulled the files of 40 administrators

and found 24 had no evaluations. The grading system used on the remaining 16 was generous. Administrators were given the highest grade possible 87 percent of the time and unsatisfactory ratings were issued in less than 1 percent of the categories in which they were graded. "It's been 24 years since my last evaluation," one administrator told auditors. "There isn't an evaluation system after administrators become tenured," another said.

When James Harris came aboard as superintendant nearly three years ago, he inherited a management staff of about 220, including assistant superintendants, directors and supervisors who work out of the central office, and principals and assistant principals working in schools. He had the authority to replace only six of the 220: three associate superintendents, two special assistants focused on budget and media relations, and a labor negotiator. Removing any of the others would have required the district to prove incompetence or misconduct. Simply doing a mediocre job, or the emergence of someone better suited for the position, are not sufficient cause to remove or demote a school administrator in Buffalo.

Unions have such a stranglehold that Harris couldn't even hire his own confidential secretary. Union work rules dictate who he got and, unlike the situation in most workplaces, she is a union member and not considered confidential management. In contrast, the mayor not only can hire his own secretary, but also commissioners, deputy commissioners and a host of other managers. In all, the mayor has control over 42 management positions that are exempt from union representation.

Masiello describes the district's lack of management rights as "an obstacle." "Management needs to have the rights and flexibility to manage and hold people accountable," he said.

But the times are changing elsewhere. A growing number of states and school districts are holding principals and other school administrators more accountable by regularly evaluating their performance and in some cases eliminating tenure. While tenure for principals is embedded in New York state law, it is being challenged around the country. Massachusetts, Georgia, North Carolina and Oregon have stripped their principals of tenure in recent years, reducing to 16 the number of states that provide principals with tenure.

The Chicago school system, considered one of the nation's most troubled districts in the '80s, has been the most aggressive in holding administrators accountable. Linking job security to student performance has been a cornerstone of efforts to improve the district, says G. Alfred Hess, director of the Center for Urban School Policy at Northwestern University and an observer to the Chicago reform movement. "We saw principals' lifetime tenure as one of the major problems in getting school improvement to happen," he says. "The leadership was not accountable for the performance of the kids,"

"Our school systems are fundamentally set up as employment agencies rather than educational institutions."

The Illinois State Legislature enacted reforms in 1988 and 1995. Councils consisting primarily of parents have gained greater control over school budgets and can hire and fire principals. The mayor appoints the school board and hires the top five central office administrators. The teachers union's power has been reduced and principals lost their tenure altogether. As a result, ineffective teachers and administrators at poorly performing schools can be fired. "The difference is night and day," Hess says. "Previously, principals understood their main job was to make sure their school didn't get into the news, except for something wonderful. And as long as they kept their school out of trouble, nobody cared what happened. Nobody ever got fired because the kids didn't learn. Now the primary question about the performance of school officials is whether their kids are learning or not."

The reforms are paying off. The percentage of students reading at national norms climbed from 24 to 35 percent from 1990 to 1998. "I would say 85 percent of the credit for changes in student achievement relate to the ability to change the principal at the school," Hess says. "Effective principals make or break improving schools."

"If you want to improve student achievement, you have to tie job security to whether kids are learning more. Otherwise educators' prejudice about the ability of low-income and minority kids to learn gets in the way of change," Hess says. "If you can say, 'It's not my fault, it's the kids I have to teach,' you're not going to get much change in those schools. But if people say, 'Your job security depends on whether kids in your classes are learning,' then you have a whole different lever for change." ●

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Why Ritalin Rules

By Mary Eberstadt

There are stories that are mere signs of the times, and then there are stories so emblematic of a particular time and place that they demand to be designated cultural landmarks. Such a story was the *New York Times'* front-page report on January 18 appearing under the tame, even soporific headline, "For School Nurses, More Than Tending the Sick."

"Ritalin, Ritalin, seizure drugs, Ritalin," in the words of its sing-song opening. "So goes the rhythm of noontime" for a typical school nurse in East Boston "as she trots her tray of brown plastic vials and paper water cups from class to class, dispensing pills into outstretched young palms." For this nurse, as for her counterparts in middle- and upper-middle class schools across the country, the day's routine is now driven by what the *Times* dubs "a ticklish question," to wit: "With the number of children across the country taking Ritalin estimated at well over three million, more than double the 1990 figure, who should be giving out the pills?"

"With nurses often serving more than one school at a time," the story goes on to explain, "the whole middle of the day can be taken up in a school-to-school scurry to dole out drugs." Massachusetts, for its part, has taken to having the nurse deputize "anyone from a principal to a secretary" to share the burden. In Florida, where the ratio of school nurses to students is particularly low, "many schools have clerical workers hand out the pills." So many pills, and so few professionals to go around. What else are the authorities to do?

Behold the uniquely American psychotropic universe, pediatrics zone — a place where "psychiatric medications in general have become more common in schools" and where, in particular, "Ritalin dominates." There are by now millions of stories in orbit here, and the particular one chosen by the *Times* — of how the drug has induced a professional labor shortage — is no doubt

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an estimable entry. But for the reader struck by some of the facts the *Times* mentions only in passing — for example, that Ritalin use more than doubled in the first half of the decade alone, that production has increased 700 percent since 1990, or that the number of schoolchildren taking the drug may now, by some estimates, be approaching the *4 million* mark — mere anecdote will only explain so much.

Fortunately, at least for the curious reader, there is a great deal of other material now on offer, for the explosion in Ritalin consumption has been very nearly matched by a publishing boom dedicated to that same phenomenon. Its harbingers include, for example, Barbara Ingersoll's now-classic 1988 *Your Hyperactive Child*, among the first works to popularize a drug regimen for what we now call Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD, called ADHD when it includes hyperactivity). Five years later, with ADD diagnoses and Ritalin prescriptions already rising steeply in the better-off neighborhoods and schools, Peter D. Kramer helped fuel the boom with his bestselling *Listening to Prozac* — a book that put the phrase "cosmetic pharmacology" into the vernacular and thereby inadvertently broke new conceptual ground for the advocates of Ritalin. In 1994, most important, psychiatrists Edward M. Hallowell and John J. Ratey published their own bestselling *Driven to Distraction: Recognizing and Coping with Attention Deficit Disorder from Childhood to Adulthood*, a book that was perhaps the single most powerful force in the subsequent proliferation of ADD diagnoses; as its opening sentence accurately prophesied, "Once you catch on to what this syndrome is all about, you'll see it everywhere."

Behold the uniquely American psychotropic universe, pediatrics zone.

Not everyone received these soundings from the psychotropic beyond with the same enthusiasm. One noteworthy dissent came in 1995 with Thomas Armstrong's *The Myth of the ADD Child*, which attacked both the scientific claims made on behalf of ADD and what Armstrong decried as the "pathologizing" of normal children. Dissent also took the form of wary public pronouncements by the National Education Association (NEA), one of several groups to harbor the fear that ADD would be used to stigmatize minority children. Meanwhile, scare stories on the abuse and side effects of Ritalin popped out here and there in the mass media, and a national controversy was born. From the middle to the late 1990s, other interested parties from all over — the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the medical journals, the National Institutes of Health (NIH), and especially the extremely active advocacy group CHADD (Children and Adults with Attention Deficit Disorder) — further stoked the debate through countless reports, conferences, pamphlets, and exchanges on the Internet.

To this outpouring of information and opinion two new books, both on the critical side of the ledger, have just been added: Richard DeGrandpre's iconoclastic *Ritalin Nation: Rapid-Fire Culture and the Transformation of Human Consciousness* (Simon and Schuster, 1999), and physician Lawrence H. Diller's superbly analytical *Running on Ritalin: A Physician Reflects on Children, Society and Performance in a Pill* (Bantam Books, 1998). Their appearance marks an unusually opportune moment in which to sift through some ten years' worth of information on Ritalin and ADD and to ask what, if anything, we have learned from the national experiment that has made both terms into household words.

Let's put the question bluntly: How has it come to pass that in *fin-de-siècle* America, where every child from preschool onward can recite the "anti-drug" catechism by heart, millions of middle- and upper-middle class children are being legally drugged with a substance so similar to cocaine that, as one journalist accurately summarized the science, "it takes a chemist to tell the difference"?

What is methylphenidate?

THE FIRST THING THAT has made the Ritalin explosion possible is that methylphenidate, to use the generic term, is perhaps the most widely misunderstood drug in America today. Despite the fact that it is, as Lawrence Diller observes in *Running on Ritalin*, "the most intensively studied drug in pediatrics," most laymen remain under a misimpression both about the nature of the drug itself and about its pharmacological effects on children.

What most people believe about this drug is the same erroneous characterization that appeared elsewhere in the *Times* piece quoted earlier — that it is "a mild stimulant of the central nervous system that, for reasons not fully understood, often helps children who are chronically distractible, impulsive and hyperactive settle down and concentrate." The word "stimulant" here is at least medically accurate. "Mild," a more ambiguous judgment, depends partly on the dosage, and partly on whether the reader can imagine describing as "mild" *any* dosage of the drugs to which methylphenidate is closely related. These include dextroamphetamine (street name: "dexies"), methamphetamine (street name: "crystal meth"), and, of course, cocaine. But the chief substance of the *Times*' formulation here — that the reasons *why* Ritalin does what it does to children remain a medical mystery — is, as informed writers from all over the debate have long acknowledged, an enduring public myth.

"Methylphenidate," in the words of a 1995 DEA background paper on the drug, "is a central nervous system (CNS) stimulant and shares many of the pharmacological effects of amphetamine, methamphetamine, and cocaine." Further, it "produces behavioral, psychological, subjective, and

reinforcing effects similar to those of d-amphetamine including increases in rating of euphoria, drug liking and activity, and decreases in sedation." For comparative purposes, that same DEA report includes a table listing the potential adverse physiological effects of both methylphenidate and dextroamphetamine; they are, as the table shows, nearly identical (see below). To put the point conversely, as Richard DeGrandpre does in *Ritalin Nation* by quoting a 1995 report in the *Archives of General Psychiatry*, "Cocaine, which is one of the most reinforcing and addicting of the abused drugs, has pharmacological actions that are very similar to those of methylphenidate, which is now the most commonly prescribed psychotropic medicine for children in the U.S."

Such pharmacological similarities have been explored over the years in numerous studies. DeGrandpre reports that "lab animals given the choice to self-administer comparative doses of cocaine and Ritalin do not favor one

Crystal Lite? Potential Adverse Effects of Ritalin and Dexies

	Methylphenidate	Dextroamphetamine
Cardiovascular	Palpitation Tachycardia Increased blood pressure	Palpitation Tachycardia Increased blood pressure
Central Nervous System	Excessive CNS stimulation Psychosis Dizziness Headache Insomnia Nervousness Irritability Attacks of Gilles de la Tourette or other tic syndromes	Excessive CNS stimulation Psychosis Dizziness Headache Insomnia Nervousness Irritability Attacks of Gilles de la Tourette or other tic syndromes
Gastrointestinal	Anorexia Nausea Vomiting Stomach pain Dry mouth	Anorexia Nausea Vomiting Stomach pain Dry mouth
Endocrine/metabolic	Weight loss Growth suppression	Weight loss Growth suppression
Other	Leukopenia Hypersensitivity reaction Anemia Blurred vision	Skin rash or hives Blurred vision

Source: U.S. Department of Justice, Drug Enforcement Administration

over another" and that "a similar study showed monkeys would work in the same fashion for Ritalin as they would for cocaine." The DEA reports another finding — that methylphenidate is actually "chosen *over* cocaine in preference studies" of non-human primates (emphasis added). In *Driven to Distraction*, pro-Ritalin psychiatrists Hallowell and Ratey underline the interchangeable nature of methylphenidate and cocaine when they observe that "people with ADD feel focused when they take cocaine, *just as they do when they take Ritalin* [emphasis added]." Moreover, methylphenidate (like other stimulants) appears to increase tolerance for related drugs. Recent evidence indicates, for example, that when people accustomed to prescribed Ritalin turn to cocaine, they seek higher doses of it than do others. To summarize, again from the DEA report, "it is clear that methylphenidate substitutes for cocaine and d-amphetamine in a number of behavioral paradigms."

Ritalin 'works' on children the way related stimulants work on adults.

All of which is to say that Ritalin "works" on children in the same way that related stimulants work on adults — sharpening the short-term attention span when the drug kicks in and producing equally predictable valleys ("coming down," in the old street parlance; "rebounding," in Ritalinese) when the effect wears off. Just as predictably, children are subject to the same adverse effects as adults imbibing such drugs, with the two most common — appetite suppression and insomnia — being of particular concern. That is why, for example, handbooks on ADD will counsel parents to see their doctor if they feel their child is losing too much weight, and why some children who take methylphenidate are also prescribed sedatives to help them sleep. It is also why one of the more Orwellian phrases in the psychotropic universe, "drug holidays" — meaning scheduled times, typically on weekends or school vacations, when the dosage of methylphenidate is lowered or the drug temporarily withdrawn in order to keep its adverse effects in check — is now so common in the literature that it no longer even appears in quotations.

Just as, contrary to folklore, the adult and child physiologies respond in the same way to such drugs, so too do the physiologies of *all* people, regardless of whether they are diagnosed with ADD or hyperactivity. As Diller puts it, in a point echoed by many other sources, methylphenidate "potentially improves the performance of anyone — child or not, ADD-diagnosed or not." Writing in the *Public Interest* last year, psychologist Ken Livingston provided a similar summary of the research, citing "studies conducted during the mid seventies to early eighties by Judith Rapaport of the National Institute of Mental Health" which "clearly showed that stimulant drugs improve the performance of most people, regardless of whether they have a diagnosis of ADHD, on tasks requiring good attention." ("Indeed," he com-

ments further in an obvious comparison, "this probably explains the high levels of 'self-medicating' around the world" in the form of "stimulants like caffeine and nicotine.")

A third myth about methylphenidate is that it, alone among drugs of its kind, is immune to being abused. To the contrary: Abuse statistics have flourished alongside the boom in Ritalin prescription-writing. Though it is quite true that elementary schoolchildren are unlikely to ingest extra doses of the drug, which is presumably kept away from little hands, a very different pattern has emerged among teenagers and adults who have the manual dexterity to open prescription bottles and the wherewithal to chop up and snort their contents (a method that puts the drug into the bloodstream far faster than oral ingestion). For this group, statistics on the proliferating abuse of methylphenidate in schoolyards and on the street are dramatic.

According to the DEA, for example, as early as 1994 Ritalin was the fastest-growing amphetamine being used "non-medically" by high school seniors in Texas. In 1991, reports DeGrandpre in *Ritalin Nation*, "children between the ages of 10 and 14 years old were involved in only about 25 emergency room visits connected with Ritalin abuse. In 1995, just four years later, that number had climbed to more than 400 visits, which for this group was about the same number of visits as for cocaine." Not surprisingly, given these and other measures of methylphenidate's recreational appeal, criminal entrepreneurs have responded with interest to the drug's increased circulation. From 1990 to 1995, the DEA reports, there were about 2,000 thefts of methylphenidate, most of them night break-ins at pharmacies — meaning that the drug "ranks in the top 10 most frequently reported pharmaceutical drugs diverted from licensed handlers."

BECAUSE SO MANY TEENAGERS and college students have access to it, methylphenidate is particularly likely to be abused on school grounds. "The prescription drug Ritalin," reported *Newsweek* in 1995, "is now a popular high on campus — with some serious side effects." DeGrandpre notes that at his own college in Vermont, Ritalin was cited as the third-favorite drug to snort in a campus survey. He also runs, without comment, scores of individual abuse stories from newspapers across the country over several pages of his book. In *Running on Ritalin*, Diller cites several undercover narcotics agents who confirm that "Ritalin is cheaper and easier to purchase at playgrounds than on the street." He further reports one particularly hazardous fact about Ritalin abuse, namely that teenagers, especially, do not consider the drug to be anywhere near as dangerous as heroin or cocaine. To the contrary: "they think that since their younger brother takes it under a doctor's prescription, it must be safe."

In short, methylphenidate looks like an amphetamine, acts like an amphetamine, and is abused like an amphetamine. Perhaps not surprisingly, those who value its medicinal effects tend to explain the drug differently. To some, Ritalin is to children what Prozac and other psychotropic "mood

brightening" drugs are to adults — a short-term fix for enhancing personality and performance. But the analogy is misleading. Prozac and its sisters are not stimulants with stimulant side effects; there is, ipso facto, no black market for drugs like these. Even more peculiar is the analogy favored by the advocates in CHADD: that "Just as a pair of glasses help the nearsighted person focus," as Hallowell and Ratey explain, "so can medication help the person with ADD see the world more clearly." But there is no black market for eyeglasses, either — nor loss of appetite, insomnia, "dysphoria" (an unexplained feeling of sadness that sometimes accompanies pediatric Ritalin-taking), nor even the faintest risk of toxic psychosis, to cite one of Ritalin's rare but dramatically chilling possible effects.

What is methylphenidate "really" like? Thomas Armstrong, writing in *The Myth of the ADD Child* four years ago, probably summarized the drug's appeal best. "Many middle and upper-middle class parents," he observed then, "see Ritalin and related drugs almost as 'cognitive steroids' that can be used to help their kids focus on their schoolwork better than the next kid." Put this way, the attraction to Ritalin makes considerable sense. In some ways, one can argue, that after-lunch hit of low-dose methylphenidate is much like the big cup from Starbucks that millions of adults swig to get them through the day — but only in some ways. There is no dramatic upswing in hospital emergency room visits and pharmacy break-ins due to caffeine abuse; the brain being jolted awake in one case is that of an adult, and in the other that of a developing child; and, of course, the substance doing the jolting on all those children is not legally available and ubiquitous caffeine, but a substance that the DEA insists on calling a Schedule II drug, meaning that it is subject to the same controls, and for the same reasons of abuse potential, as related stimulants and other powerful drugs like morphine.

What is CHADD?

This mention of Schedule II drugs brings us to a second reason for the Ritalin explosion in this decade. That is the extraordinary political and medical clout of CHADD, by far the largest of the ADD support groups and a lobbying organization of demonstrated prowess. Founded in 1987, CHADD had, according to Diller, grown by 1993 to include 35,000 families and 600 chapters nationally. Its professional advisory board, he notes, "includes most of the most prominent academicians in the ADD world, a veritable who's who in research."

Like most support groups in self-help America, CHADD functions partly as clearing-house and information center for its burgeoning membership — organizing speaking events, issuing a monthly newsletter (*Chadderbox*), putting out a glossy magazine (named, naturally enough, *Attention!*), and operating an exceedingly active website stocked with on-line fact sheets and items for sale. Particular scrutiny is given to every legal and political devel-

opment offering new benefits for those diagnosed with ADD. On these and other fronts of interest, CHADD leads the ADD world. "No matter how many sources of information are out there," as a slogan on its website promises, "CHADD is the one you can trust."

One of CHADD's particular strengths is that it is exquisitely media-sensitive, and has a track record of delivering speedy responses to any reports on Ritalin or ADD that the group deems inaccurate. Diller quotes as representative one fundraising letter from 1997, where the organization listed its chief goals and objectives as "conduct[ing] a proactive media campaign" and "challeng[ing] negative, inaccurate reports that demean or undermine people with ADD." Citing "savage attacks" in the *Wall Street Journal* and *Forbes*, the letter also went on to exhort readers into "fighting these battles of misinformation, innuendo, ignorance and outright hostility toward CHADD and adults who have a neurobiological disorder." The circle-the-wagons rhetoric here appears to be typical of the group, as is the zeal.

The circle-the-wagons rhetoric here appears to be typical of the group, as is the zeal.

Certainly it was with missionary fervor that CHADD, in 1995, mounted an extraordinary campaign to make Ritalin easier to obtain. Methylphenidate, as mentioned, is a Schedule II drug. That means, among other things, that the DEA must approve an annual production quota for the substance — a fact that irritates those who rely on it, since it raises the specter, if only in theory, of a Ritalin "shortage." It also means that some states require that prescriptions for Ritalin be written in triplicate for the purpose of monitoring its use, and that refills cannot simply be called into the pharmacy as they can for Schedule III drugs (for example, low-dosage opiates like Tylenol with codeine, and various compounds used to treat migraine). Doctors, particularly those who prescribe Ritalin in quantity, are inconvenienced by this requirement. So too are many parents, who dislike having to stop by the doctor's office every time the Ritalin runs out. Moreover, many parents and doctors alike object to methylphenidate's Schedule II classification in principle, on the grounds that it makes children feel stigmatized; the authors of *Driven to Distraction*, for example, claim that one of the most common problems in treating ADD is that "some pharmacists, in their attempt to comply with federal regulations, make consumers [of Ritalin] feel as though they are obtaining illicit drugs."

For all of these reasons, CHADD petitioned the DEA to reclassify Ritalin as a Schedule III drug. This petition was co-signed by the American Academy of Neurology, and it was also supported by other distinguished medical bodies, including the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Psychological Association, and the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. Diller's account of this episode in *Running on Ritalin* is particularly credible, for he is a doctor who has himself written many prescriptions for Ritalin in

cases where he has judged it to be indicated. Nevertheless, he found himself dissenting strongly from the effort to decontrol it — an effort that, as he writes, was "unprecedented in the history of Schedule II substances" and "could have had a profound impact on the availability of the drug."

What happened next, while CHADD awaited the DEA's verdict, was in Diller's words "a bombshell." For before the DEA had officially responded, a television documentary revealed that Ciba-Geigy (now called Novartis), the pharmaceuticals giant that manufactures Ritalin, had contributed nearly $900,000 to CHADD over five years, and that CHADD had failed to disclose the contributions to all but a few selected members.

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The response from the DEA, which appeared in the background report cited earlier, was harsh and uncompromising. Backed by scores of footnotes and well over a 100 sources in the medical literature, this report amounted to a public excoriation of CHADD's efforts and a meticulous description, alarming for those who have read it, of the realities of Ritalin use and abuse. "Most of the ADHD literature prepared for public consumption and available to parents," the DEA charged, "does not address the abuse liability or actual abuse of methylphenidate. Instead, methylphenidate is routinely portrayed as a benign, mild stimulant that is not associated with abuse or serious effects. In reality, however, there is an abundance of scientific literature which indicates that methylphenidate shares the same abuse potential as other Schedule II stimulants."

The DEA went on to note its "concerns" over "the depth of the financial relationship between CHADD and Ciba-Geigy." Ciba-Geigy, the DEA observed, "stands to benefit from a change in scheduling of methylphenidate." It further observed that the United Nations International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) had "expressed concern about non-governmental organizations and parental associations in the United States that are actively lobbying for the medical use of methylphenidate for children with ADD." (The rest of the world, it should be noted, has yet to acquire the American taste for Ritalin. Sweden, for example, had methylphenidate withdrawn from the market in 1968 following a spate of abuse cases. Today, 90 percent of Ritalin production is consumed in the United States.) The report concluded with the documented observations that "abuse data indicate a growing problem among school-age children," that "ADHD adults have a high incidence of substance disorders," and that "with three to five percent of today's youth being administered methylphenidate on a chronic basis, these issues are of great concern."

Yet whatever public embarrassment CHADD and its supporters may have suffered on account of this setback turned out to be short-lived. Though it

failed in the attempt to decontrol Ritalin (in the end, the group withdrew its petition), on other legislative fronts CHADD was garnering one victory after another. By the end of the 1990s, thanks largely to CHADD and its allies, an ADD diagnosis could lead to an impressive array of educational, financial, and social service benefits.

In elementary and high school classrooms, a turning point came in 1991 with a letter from the U.S. Department of Education to state school superintendents outlining "three ways in which children labeled ADD could qualify for special education services in public school under existing laws," as Diller puts it. This directive was based on the landmark 1990 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which "mandates that eligible children receive access to special education and/or related services, and that this education be designed to meet each child's unique educational needs" through an individualized program. As a result, ADD-diagnosed children are now entitled by law to a long list of services, including separate special-education classrooms, learning specialists, special equipment, tailored homework assignments, and more. The IDEA also means that public school districts unable to accommodate such children may be forced to pick up the tab for private education.

IN THE FIELD OF HIGHER EDUCATION, where the first wave of Ritalin-taking students has recently landed, an ADD diagnosis can be parlayed into other sorts of special treatment. Diller reports that ADD-based requests for extra time on SATs, LSATs, and MCATs have risen sharply in the course of the 1990s. Yet the example of such high-profile tests is only one particularly measurable way of assessing ADD's impact on education; in many classrooms, including college classrooms, similar "accommodations" are made informally at a student's demand. A professor in the Ivy League tells me that students with an ADD diagnosis now come to him "waving doctor's letters and pills" and requesting extra time for routine assignments. To refuse "accommodation" is to risk a hornet's nest of liabilities, as a growing caseload shows. A 1996 article in *Forbes* cites the example of Whittier Law School, which was sued by an ADD-diagnosed student for giving only 20 extra minutes per hourlong exam instead of a full hour. The school, fearing an expensive legal battle, settled the suit. It further undertook a preventive measure: banning pop quizzes "because ADD students need separate rooms and extra time."

Concessions have also been won by advocates in the area of college athletics. The National College Athletic Association (NCAA) once prohibited Ritalin usage (as do the U.S. and International Olympic Committees today) because of what Diller calls its "possible acute performance-enhancing benefits." In 1993, citing legal jeopardy as a reason for changing course, the NCAA capitulated. Today a letter from the team physician will suffice to allow an athlete to ingest Ritalin, even though that same athlete would be disqualified from participating in the Olympics if he were to test positive for stimulants.

Nor are children and college students the only ones to claim benefits in the name of ADD. With adults now accounting for the fastest-growing subset of ADD diagnoses, services and accommodations are also proliferating in the workplace. The enabling regulations here are 1997 guidelines from the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) which linked traits like chronic lateness, poor judgment, and hostility to coworkers — in other words, the sorts of traits people get fired for — to "psychiatric impairments," meaning traits that are protected under the law. As one management analyst for the *Wall Street Journal* recently observed (and as CHADD regularly reminds its readers), these EEOC guidelines have already generated a list of accommodations for ADD-diagnosed employees, including special office furniture, special equipment such as tape recorders and laptops, and byzantine organizational schemes (color coding, buddy systems, alarm clocks, and other "reminders") designed to keep such employees on track. "Employers," this writer warned, "could find themselves facing civil suits and forced to restore the discharged people to their old positions, or even give them promotions as well as back pay or reasonable accommodation."

An ADD diagnosis can also be helpful in acquiring Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits. SSI takes income into account in providing benefits to the ADD diagnosed; in that, it is an exception to the trend. Most of the benefits now available, as even this brief review indicates, have come to be provided in principle, on account of the diagnosis per se. Seen this way, and taking the class composition of the ADD-diagnosed into account, it is no wonder that more and more people, as Diller and many other doctors report, are now marching into medical offices demanding a letter, a diagnosis, and a prescription. The pharmacological charms of Ritalin quite apart, ADD can operate, in effect, as affirmative action for affluent white people.

What is Attention Deficit Disorder?

ANOTHER FACTOR THAT has put Ritalin into millions of medicine cabinets has to do with the protean nature of the disorder for which it is prescribed — a disorder that was officially so designated by the American Psychiatric Association in 1980, and one that, to cite Thomas Armstrong, "has gone through at least 25 different name changes in the past century."

Despite the successful efforts to have ADD construed as a disability like blindness, the question of what ADD *is* remains passionately disputed. To CHADD, of course, it is a "neurobiological disorder," and not only to CHADD; "the belief that ADD is a neurological disease," as Diller writes, also "prevails today among medical researchers and university teaching faculty" and "is reflected in the leading journals of psychiatry." What the critics observe is something else — that "despite highly successful efforts to define ADD as a well-established disorder of the brain," as DeGrandpre puts it in a

formulation echoed by many, "three decades of medical science have yet to produce any substantive evidence to support such a claim."

Nonetheless, the effort to produce such evidence has been prodigious. Research on the neurological side of ADD has come to resemble a Holy Grail-like quest for something, anything, that can be said to set the ADD brain apart — genes, imbalances of brain chemicals like dopamine and serotonin, neurological damage, lead poisoning, thyroid problems, and more. The most famous of these studies, and the chief grounds on which ADD has come to be categorized as a neurobiological disability, was reported in *The New England Journal of Medicine* in 1990 by Alan Zametkin and colleagues at the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH). These researchers used then-new positron emission tomography (PET) scanning to measure differences in glucose metabolizing between hyperactive adults and a control group. According to the study's results, what emerged was a statistically significant difference in the rates of glucose metabolism — a difference hailed by many observers as the first medical "proof" of a biological basis for ADD.

Research on the neurological side has come to resemble a Holy Grail-like quest.

Diller and DeGrandpre are only the latest to argue, at length, that the Zametkin study established no such thing. For starters — and from the scientific point of view, most important — a series of follow-up studies, as Diller documents, "failed to confirm" the original result. DeGrandpre, for his part, details the methodological problems with the study itself — that the participants were adults rather than children, meaning that the implications for the majority of the Ritalin-taking population were unclear at best; that there was "no evidence" that the reported difference in metabolism bore any relationship to behavioral activity; that the study was further plagued by "a confounding variable that had nothing to do with ADD," namely that the control group included far fewer male subjects than the ADD group; and that, even if there had been a valid difference in metabolism between the two groups, "this study tells us nothing about the cause of these differences."

Numerous other attempts to locate the missing link between ADD and brain activity are likewise dissected by Diller and DeGrandpre in their books. So too is the causal fallacy prevalent in ADD literature — that if a child responds positively to Ritalin, that response "proves" that he has an underlying biological disorder. This piece of illogic is easily dismissed. As these and other authors emphasize, drugs like Ritalin have the same effect on just about everybody. Give it to almost any child, and the child will become more focused and less aggressive — one might say, easier to manage — whether or not there were "symptoms" of ADD in the first place.

In sum, and as Thomas Armstrong noted four years ago in *The Myth of*

the ADD *Child*, ADD remains an elusive disorder that "cannot be authoritatively identified in the same way as polio, heart disease, or other legitimate illnesses." Instead, doctors depend on a series of tests designed to measure the panoply of ADD symptoms. To cite Armstrong again: "there is no prime mover in this chain of tests; no First Test for ADD that has been declared self-referential and infallible." Some researchers, for example, use "continuous performance tasks" (CPTs) that require the person being tested to pay attention throughout a series of repetitive actions. A popular CPT is the Gordon Diagnostic System, a box that flashes numbers, whose lever is supposed to be pressed every time a particular combination appears. Yet as numerous critics have suggested, although the score that results is supposed to tell us about a given child's ability to attend, its actual significance is rather ambiguous; perhaps, as Armstrong analyzes, "it only tells how a child will perform when attending to a repetitive series of meaningless numbers on a soulless task."

As one pediatrician put it succinctly, 'The diagnosis is a mess.'

In the absence of any positive medical or scientific test, the diagnosis of ADD in both children and adults depends, today as a decade ago, almost exclusively on behavioral criteria. The diagnostic criteria for children, according to the latest *Diagnostic and Statistics Manual* (DSM-IV), include six or more months' worth of some 14 activities such as fidgeting, squirming, distraction by extraneous stimuli, difficulty waiting turns, blurting out answers, losing things, interrupting, ignoring adults, and so on. (To read the list is to understand why boys are diagnosed with ADD three to five times as often as girls.) The diagnostic latitude offered by this list is obvious; as Diller understates the point, "what often strikes those encountering DSM criteria for the first time is how common these symptoms are among children" generally.

The DSM criteria for adults are if anything even more expansive, and include such ambiguous phenomena as a sense of underachievement, difficulty getting organized, chronic procrastination, a search for high stimulation, impatience, impulsivity, and mood swings. Hallowell and Ratey's 100-question test for ADD in *Driven to Distraction*, an elaborately extrapolated version of the DSM checklist, illustrates this profound elasticity. Their questions range from the straightforward ("Are you impulsive?" "Are you easily distracted?" "Do you fidget a lot?") to more elusive ways of eliciting the disorder ("Do you change the radio station in your car frequently?" "Are you always on the go, even when you don't really want to be?" "Do you have a hard time reading a book all the way through?"). Throughout, the distinction between what is pathological and what is not remains unclear — because, in the authors' words, "There is no clear line of demarcation between ADD and normal behavior."

Thus the business of diagnosing ADD remains, as Diller puts it, "very much in the eye of the beholder." In 1998, partly for that reason, the National Institutes of Health convened a conference on ADD with hundreds of participants and a panel of 13 doctors and educators. This conference, as newspapers reported at the time, broke no new ground, and indeed could not reach agreement on several important points — for instance, how long children should take drugs for ADD, or whether and when drug treatment might become risky. Even more interesting, conference members could not agree on what is arguably the rather fundamental question of how to diagnose the disorder in the first place. As one panelist, a pediatrician, put it succinctly, "The diagnosis is a mess."

Who has ADD?

TO TEST THIS HYPOTHESIS, I gave copies of Hallowell and Ratey's questionnaire to 20 people (let's call them subjects) and asked them to complete it and total up the number of times they checked "yes." The full questionnaire appears at the conclusion of this piece so that interested readers can take it themselves. "These questions," as Hallowell and Ratey note, "reflect those an experienced diagnostician would ask." Although, as they observe, "this quiz cannot confirm the diagnosis" (as we have seen already, nothing can), it does "offer a rough assessment as to whether professional help should be sought." In short, "the more questions that are answered 'yes,' the more likely it is that AD/D may be present."

In a stab at methodological soundness, I had equal numbers of males and females take the test. All would be dubbed middle- or upper-middle class, all but one are or have been professionals of one sort or another, all are white, and the group was politically diverse — which is to say, the sample accurately reflects the socioeconomic pool from which most of the current Ritalin-taking population is drawn. As to the matter of observer interference, although some subjects may have guessed what the questionnaire was looking for, all of them (myself excepted, of course) took the test "blind," that is, without any accompanying material to prejudice their responses.

We begin with results at the lower end of the scale. Of the 18 subjects who completed the test, two delivered "yes" scores of 8 and 10 (a professor of English and his wife, an at-home mother active in philanthropy). These "yes" results, as it turned out, were at least threefold lower than anyone else's. In "real" social science, according to some expert sources, we would simply call these low scores "outliers" and throw them out for the same reason. We, however, shall include them, if only on the amateur grounds of scrupulousness.

The next lowest "yes" tallies — 29 in each case — were achieved by an editorial assistant and a school nurse. That is to say, even these "low scorers" managed to answer yes *almost a third of the time* (remember, "the more

questions that are answered 'yes,' the more likely it is that ADD may be present"). After them, we find a single "yes" score of 33 (an assistant editor). Following that, fully six subjects, or a third of the test-finishers, produced scores in the 40s. These include this magazine's editor, two at-home mothers (one a graphic designer, the other a poet), a writer for *Time* and other distinguished publications, *Policy Review*'s business manager, and — scoring an estimable 49 — the headmaster of a private school in Washington.

The drug makes children do what their parents and teachers cannot get them to do without it: Sit down, shut up, keep still, pay attention.

Proceeding into the upper echelons, a novelist who is also an at-home mother reported her score as 55, and a renowned demographic expert with ties to Harvard and Washington think tanks scored a 57. A male British journalist and at-home father achieved a 60, and a female American journalist and at-home mother (me) got a 62. Still another at-home mother, this one with a former career in public relations, garnered a 65.

In the lead, at least of the test-finishers, was a bestselling satirist whom we shall call, for purposes of anonymity, Patrick O'Rourke; he produced an estimable score of 75. "Mr. O'Rourke" further advanced the cause of science by answering the questions on behalf of his 16-month-old daughter; according to his proud report, 65 was the result. Then there were the two subjects who, for whatever reason, were unable to complete the test in the first place. One of these subjects called to say that he'd failed to finish the test because he'd "gotten bored checking off so many yes answers." When I pressed him for some, any, final tally for me to include, he got irritated and refused, saying he was "too lazy" to count them up. Finally he said "50 would be about right," take it or leave it. He is a Wall Street investment banker specializing in the creation of derivative securities. Our last subject, perhaps the most pathological of all, failed to deliver any score despite repeated reminding phone calls from the research team. He is the professor mentioned earlier, the one who reported that ADD is now being used as a blanket for procrastination and shirking on campus.

Now on to interpreting the results. Apart from the exceedingly anomalous two scores of ten and under, all the rest of the subjects reported answering "yes" to at least a quarter of the questions — surely enough to trigger the possibility of an ADD diagnosis, at least in those medical offices Diller dubs "Ritalin mills." (As for the one subject who reported no result whatsoever, he is obviously entitled to untold ADD bonus points for that reason alone.) Fully 15 of the finishers, or 80-plus percent, answered yes to one-third of the questions or more. Eight of the finishers, or 40-plus percent of

the sample, answered yes more than half of the time, with a number of scores in the high 40s right behind them. In other words, *roughly half of the sample answered yes roughly half of the time.*

My favorite comment on the exercise came from the school nurse (who scored, one recalls, a *relatively* low 29). She has a background in psychiatry, and therefore realized what kind of diagnosis the questionnaire was designed to elicit. When she called to report her result, she said that taking the test had made her think hard about the whole ADD issue. "My goodness," she concluded, "it looks like the kind of thing almost anybody could have." This brings us to the fourth reason for the explosion of ADD and its prescribed corollary, Ritalin: The nurse is right.

What is childhood?

THE FOURTH AND MOST obvious reason millions of Americans, most of them children, are now taking Ritalin can be summarized in a single word that crops up everywhere in the dry-bones literature on ADD and its drug of choice: *compliance*. One day at a time, the drug continues to make children do what their parents and teachers either will not or cannot get them to do without it: Sit down, shut up, keep still, pay attention. That some children are born with or develop behavioral problems so severe that drugs like Ritalin are a godsend is true and sad. It is also irrelevant to the explosion in psychostimulant prescriptions. For most, the drug is serving a more nuanced purpose — that of "help[ing] your child to be more agreeable and less argumentative," as Barbara Ingersoll put it over a decade ago in *Your Hyperactive Child*.

There are, as was mentioned, millions of stories in the Ritalin universe, and the literature of advocates and critics alike all illustrates this point. There is no denying that millions of people benefit from having children take Ritalin — the many, many parents who will attest that the drug has improved their child's school performance, their home lives, often even their own marriages; the teachers who have been relieved by its effects in their classrooms, and have gone on to proselytize other parents of other unruly children (frequently, it is teachers who first suggest that a child be checked for the disorder); and the doctors who, when faced with all these grateful parents and teachers, find, as Diller finds, that "at times the pressure for me to medicate a child is intense."

Some other stories seep through the literature too, but only if one goes looking for them. These are the stories standing behind the clinical accounts of teenagers who lie and say they've taken the day's dose when they haven't, or of the children who cry in doctor's offices and "cheek" the pill (hide it rather than swallow, another linguistic innovation of Ritalinese) at home. These are the stories standing behind such statements as the following, culled from case studies throughout the literature: "It takes over of me [sic];

it takes control."
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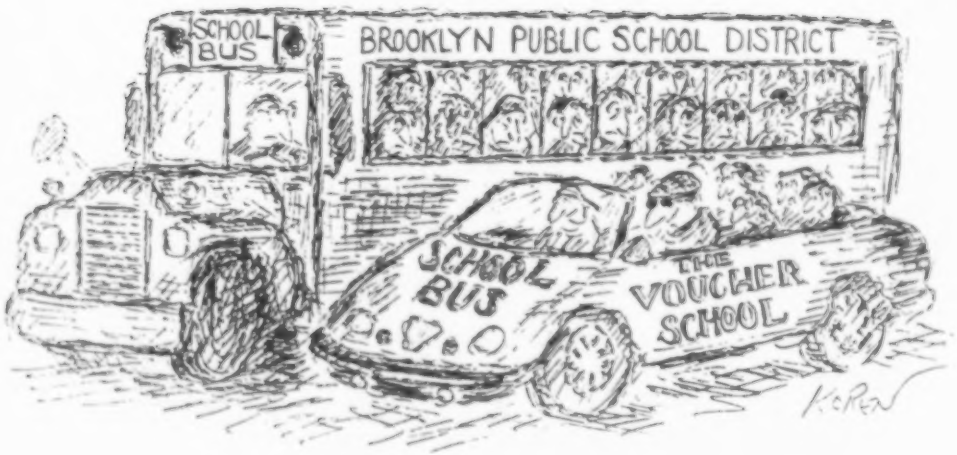
lt numbed me." "Taking it meant I was dumb." "I feel ; pills; why me?" "It makes me feel like a baby." And, ıtive of all, "I don't know how to explain. I just don't more."

, as any reader will recognize, appeal only to sentiment; , has long since declared its loyalties. In the end, what n outbreak not only possible but inevitable is the ongo- American medical establishment — and not only that particularly enthusiastic account of the drug in a recent *Yorker*, writer Malcolm Gladwell exults in the idea that ding to the young cognitive aids of a kind that used to be for the old." He further suggests that, given expert esti- alence of ADD (up to 10 percent of the population, expert), if anything "too few" children are taking the se experts have a point. Surely this country can do more, ice fidgeting, squirming, talking excessively, interrupting, ing adults, and all those other pathologies of what used od.

The New Yorker, March 22, 1999



174

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